

THE REFUGEE CRISIS || THE BALLAD OF FRANKIE AND BILLIE

THE EDITORS

DAVID HAJDU

THE Nation.

150

SEPT. 28/OCT. 5, 2015

**WHAT DOES IT
MEAN TO BE A
RADICAL POPE?**

WEN STEPHENSON
KATHA POLLITT
NATHAN SCHNEIDER

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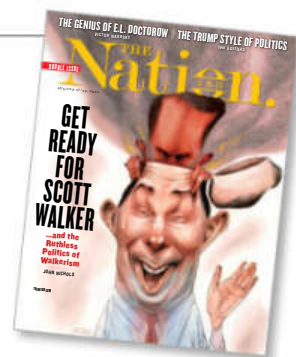
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Life in the Major League

In his review of Paul Beatty's novel *The Sellout* ["Shelf Life," August 17/24], Jesse McCarthy includes me among a group of writers in "perpetual search of an audience." Just because most of my books and theater have been ignored by the New York media—including *The Nation*, which hasn't reviewed a book of mine since the early 1980s—doesn't mean that I lack a wide audience. The New York media view black literature in terms of one-at-a-time tokens, which conveys the impression that black talent is rare. It's common. This is a form of literary neocolonialism, where dangerous natives are separated from those who are more accommodating. I've seen tokens come and go.

As a result of my novel *Japanese by Spring*, written in three languages, I was invited to Japan and China. Though the book was ignored here, it received enthusiastic reviews in both countries. My novel *Juice!* was also ignored in this country but was received favorably in China and by *The Times Literary Supplement* in London. In June, my play *Mother Hubbard* was performed in Xiangtan by a Chinese cast, with an enthusiastic review from the *Hunan Daily*.

All of my books are being translated into Chinese. In May, I was honored at a conference in Mulhouse, France, where scholars from India,

Europe, and China read papers about my work. My appearance in Freiberg, Germany, was featured in *Badische-Zeitung* ("Der 77-jährige Ishmael Reed ist eine Legende als Dichter, Denker und Jazzer"). During the same trip, my daughter and I performed our poetry accompanied by students from the jazz school at Basel, Switzerland's Music Academy. In addition to writing nonfiction, fiction, poetry, theater, and songs, performed by such eminent pop stars as Macy Gray, I play jazz piano and appear on the CD *For All We Know*, performed by the Ishmael Reed Quartet featuring David Murray. I'm 77 years old and have two jobs: poet laureate of the San Francisco Jazz Center and visiting scholar at the California College of the Arts.

My last three books—*Barack Obama and the Jim Crow Media*; *Going Too Far: Essays About America's Nervous Breakdown*; and *The Complete Muhammad Ali*, which came out last month—were published in Montreal. As of this writing, the latter is No. 1 among the 100 Ali books in Canada and No. 2 in the United States, even without the blessing of the New York literary establishment, whose endorsement, in the past, was essential to a black author's gaining traction.

As a result of a trip to Nigeria, my Ishmael Reed Publishing Company

(continued on page 34)

letters@thenation.com

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Our Refugee Crisis

All over Europe and the Mediterranean world, barriers are being breached: the natural and man-made barriers used by nation-states to shut out unwanted travelers; the barriers of fear and grief that keep people from fleeing war or poverty until they have no choice; the barriers of indifference that enable

the rest of us to get on with our lives as if those men, women, and children were no concern of ours. More than 380,000 people have crossed the Mediterranean this year in search of safety, two-thirds of them landing in Greece; at least 2,850 have drowned or are missing at sea. Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, and others walk for days in the heat, sleep rough on docks or station platforms or by the side of the road, are tear-gassed and beaten at borders and crammed into trains like cattle as they try to make their way north.

The numbers keep on growing, but for those on the edge of Europe struggling with their own troubles, the story is not new. The authorities are overwhelmed, as are the solidarity networks that offer food and water, shelter and medical care. On a continent that seemed divided between north and south by the financial crisis, the refugee crisis has revealed a different rift: between thousands of ordinary citizens, from Greece to Germany to Britain, ready to share their bread and open up their homes, and governments determined to fortify their borders and protect their power, backed by both the anxious and the frankly xenophobic.

It's taken clashes in Greece and on the Macedonian border, the death of 71 people in a truck in Austria, and public horror at those photographs of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, small and limp as a rag doll in a Turkish officer's hands, to prick the European Union into a belated and inadequate response. Germany has taken the lead, opening its borders to Syrians, suspending the iniquitous Dublin III regulation that requires refugees to apply for asylum in the first European Union country they enter, and supporting as a first step a plan to settle at least 160,000 Syrians in EU member states. Germany, said Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel, could accept half a million refugees a year "for several years." But

Hungary, Poland, and Denmark will have none of it. Britain (which funds refugee camps in the Middle East) has offered to take a mere 20,000 people directly from the region in the next five years. The suffering and chaos that result from the failure to act nourish the far right—as well as homegrown jihadis—more effectively than a program of integration ever would.

But this is not a problem for Europe to solve alone. The Syrian civil war has displaced more than 4 million people, most of them to other countries in the region—though conspicuously not to the Persian Gulf states or Saudi Arabia, friend to the West and armorer of Islamist fighters in Syria. The rise of the Islamic State, or ISIS—now terrorizing Syria and Iraq and threatening neighboring countries—was sparked by the aftermath of the Iraq invasion and further fueled by the misguided

tactics of the United States and Britain in Syria. Yet the United States has accepted just 1,500 Syrian refugees since the civil war began. Of the 22 presidential candidates, only Martin O'Malley has called for an increase in numbers, up to 65,000. Neither Hillary Clinton nor Bernie Sanders has responded to requests from the UK-based newspaper *The Guardian* to comment on the issue.

Meanwhile, the people keep coming, and will continue to risk their lives to come. The Syrians entering Europe now are fleeing war, not poverty, but anyone who has spent time among refugees and migrants knows that these forms of violence often go hand in hand. Two billion people live on less than \$1.25 a day. The barrier that once protected the rich world from the poor has been crumbling for years, undermined by globalization and the information revolution. No amount of barbed wire or steel can stand it up again.



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Cover illustration by Edel Rodriguez.




Pages of e-mails Hillary Clinton turned over to the State Department for review from her time as secretary of state



E-mails Clinton asked to be released to the public



E-mails Clinton deleted, claiming they were private in nature

\$6M

Projected budget for the Benghazi Select Committee, which is investigating Clinton's e-mails

"I love it. Those messages disappear all by themselves."

Hillary Clinton, talking about the social-media app Snapchat at a campaign event in Iowa

About Those E-Mails...

How exceptional was Hillary Clinton's private server?

Recent revelations that, during her tenure as secretary of state, Hillary Clinton maintained a private e-mail server separate from the State Department's official one raise a question that transcends the current debate over whether she compromised national security: Was the former secretary's decision exceptional, or did it reflect what had been (and conceivably remains) the practice of senior White House and intelligence-agency officials to preclude, or at least minimize, the exposure of controversial, even illegal policy decisions?

Clinton's reliance on a private e-mail account ensured that, because her communications were not logged into the State Department's records system, she alone could determine which of them would be destroyed and which would be saved. A further issue involves the inadvertent discovery of her actions—that is, as the by-product of Congress's narrow inquiry into the Benghazi matter. This inadvertent revelation raises an additional query: Did other senior administration and intelligence officials, unwilling to rely solely on classification restrictions, devise special procedures to prevent the discovery of their actions? For, as we belatedly learned through the congressional investigations of the 1970s and '80s and the release of records in response to Freedom of Information Act requests, senior intelligence officials involved in controversial and politically sensitive operations had purposely and covertly instituted a series of separate procedures to keep and destroy records.

Dating from the early 1940s, for example, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover maintained especially sensitive records in two secret office files that were separate from the FBI's central records system. Those records documented the FBI's illegal investigative techniques and the collection of derogatory information on prominent Americans.

Hoover also instituted a series of special records and record-destruction policies ("Do Not File," "June Mail," and blue, pink, or informal memorandums), and he authorized senior FBI officials to regularly purge the contents of their own secret office files.

In 1973, responding to the creation of the Senate Watergate Committee, CIA director Richard Helms ordered the destruction of all the tapes and transcripts of his office and telephone conversations. CIA officials also authorized the use of "soft files" and "privacy channels" to send (and then destroy) sensitive communications—and specifically authorized the destruction of the agency's records on its infamous drug program, MK-ULTRA; on Chile's Manuel Contreras (head of the country's murderous secret police under dictator Augusto Pinochet); and on the CIA-engineered 1953 coup that overthrew President Mohammad Mossadegh in Iran.

The National Security Agency similarly created special records and record-destruction policies involving two il-

legal programs: Project Minaret (running from 1967 to 1973, it intercepted the international communications of anti-Vietnam War and civil-rights activists) and Project Shamrock (running from 1947 to 1975, it intercepted telegraph messages in transit to and from the United States). And Oliver North, a National Security Council aide in the Reagan administration, created a "do not log" procedure to manage communications to his boss, John Poindexter—and then, when the Iran/Contra scandal broke, destroyed those records (although North's ignorance that the NSC computer system maintained a backup memory allowed investigators to reconstruct some of those records).

At a time when the public and Congress are exploring how the George W. Bush administration, by classifying records on national-security grounds, was able to secretly authorize the NSA's Terrorism Surveillance Program and the CIA's rendition and torture programs, it is equally important to explore whether the secret procedures employed in the past continue. Bush White House officials created special e-mail accounts for their communications with the Republican National Committee—and it was

subsequently revealed that many of those e-mails had been destroyed or were missing. More seriously, attorneys from the Office of Professional Responsibility found, in the course of their investigation into legal rulings by Justice Department attorneys John Yoo, Patrick Philbin, and Jay Bybee, that many of their e-mails were missing and that "most of"

Yoo's and Philbin's e-mail records covering the period from July to August 2002 "had been deleted and were not recoverable." In addition, forewarned of Congress's intent to convene hearings on CIA interrogation practices, agency officials in 2005 destroyed 92 videotapes of the CIA's brutal treatment of Al Qaeda detainees Abu Zubaydah and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri.

These recent practices not only confirm that Hillary Clinton's actions were *not* exceptional; they underscore the need for a broader examination of the US government's practices for keeping records to ensure the effectiveness of congressional and judicial oversight. **ATHAN THEOHARIS**

Athan Theoharis, an emeritus professor of history at Marquette University, is the author, most recently, of Abuse of Power: How Cold War Surveillance and Secrecy Policy Shaped the Response to 9/11.

Not very—officials have been hiding records for decades.

COMMENT

Nation Awards

The National Association of Black Journalists' Salute to Excellence has honored our special issue, "The Fight for Racial Justice," as well as columnist Patricia J. Williams for her monthly "Diary of a Mad Law Professor." NLGJA: The Association of LGBT Journalists has honored executive editor Richard Kim for his column, "Against the Current." And on September 29, the Roosevelt Institute will present the 2015 Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award to **The Nation** at St. James' Church in New York City. The event is free and open to the public; please visit this issue page online for further information and a link to RSVP.

Q&A ADA COLAU

Ada Colau, the first woman mayor of Barcelona, has just marked her first two months in office. Previously an activist, she's the founder of the Platform for

People Affected by Mortgages (PAH). In this interview, Colau talks about the challenges of leading one of Spain's most celebrated cities during the current democratic revolution.

This interview has been translated from Spanish and edited and condensed. —Elia Gran

EG: What have you done since taking office?

AC: When we arrived, we had an emergency plan ready—obvious things like guaranteeing food for children at risk. We also started a conversation with the banks and SAREB [the private entity created to assist in the cleanup of Spain's financial sector] to recover homes.

EG: In Madrid, there are already actions being taken against Blackstone [the US investment company] because of its role in the housing crisis.

AC: Here, about 400 apartments have had their management privatized by vulture funds. During the housing bubble, the neoliberal mantra was that if there was a lot of economic activity, even through speculation on basic needs like housing, everyone wins. This has been shown to be false.

EG: You are establishing a one-year ban on new tourist accommodations. Can you elaborate?

AC: We've always said that tourism is a very important asset

for the city. Precisely because it is important, we want to make it sustainable. Right now, it has grown out of control: There has been an 18 percent increase in tourism during the last four years, which reminds us of the housing bubble. We needed to stop for a second and evaluate what the tourism industry's impact is, and who is receiving the benefits. Not only did we temporarily stop permits for tourist accommodations, but we immediately created a municipal tourism council so that everyone can participate under equal conditions—starting with the people of the districts that are most affected by tourist overpopulation, but with every actor involved, including businesses. Something as simple as this was never done in past decades.

There is indeed a lot of money being generated from tourism, but this money ends up only in the hands of a few, and a lot of the jobs created are very precarious. We want Barcelona to be a reference city in terms of labor rights, and so we have to intervene in every economic activity, to make sure that its benefits are truly distributed adequately and to everyone.

EG: Coming from social movements, it must have been a big change to start working from inside City Hall. Where do you think the real structural

changes come from: inside the institutions or outside, from citizens' mobilization?

AC: It would be a mistake to assume a linear approach to this question. This error was made during the Spanish transitional period—to think that first you carry out the fight in the streets, and after that from inside the institutions.

Barcelona was an important city in the fight against the dictatorship. There was a neighborhood civic network that became almost a worldwide example. Many of the victories and achievements in the city were understood because of the existence of this cultural and social mobilization in many different spheres. We all want a more democratic city where human rights are respected as the first and maximum

priority—a fairer, more equal, environmentally sustainable city, created from inside and outside the institutions. There is a difference in what you can achieve in each framework, but they are both indispensable.

I think one of the things we have learned is that for real democracy to exist, there should always be an organized citizenship keeping an eye on the government—no matter who is in charge.

EG: What is your perspective on the upcoming elections?

AC: In the story of humanity, everything is impossible until it becomes possible. I think the two-party system is obviously at its end. And in this period of transition, in this electoral year, that will have an impact. But it won't be resolved this year; the process goes further than that. ■

We want Barcelona to be a reference city in terms of labor rights, to make sure that the benefits are truly distributed adequately and to everyone.



BACK ISSUES/1963

The Church Embraces the Future

The times in which Marxist socialism was a heresy to be stamped out with fire and sword

are indeed over for the Catholic Church," wrote Elisabeth Mann Borgese, daughter of the novelist Thomas Mann, in *The Nation* in January 1963. Headlined "The Church Embraces the Future," her report detailed Pope John XXIII's efforts to liberalize the church with the Second Vatican Council. "Turning [its] back on medievalism," Mann Borgese wrote, "opens new possibilities of coming to terms with science and progress."

John XXIII died a few months later and was succeeded by Pope Paul VI, who continued the reforms. "A new style of papacy is being created, a new frontier is being opened," Mann Borgese wrote a year later.

"A closed, static, medieval organization cannot live in an open, dynamic, modern world. History itself is forcing the transformation.... The Catholic Church was, at its origins, the wellspring of Western civilization. To see it return to these origins, to that part of it which is essential and therefore truly catholic or universal, the wellspring, perhaps, of a universal civilization in the making, is no mean spectacle.

"If during this process the Church sheds most of its historical identity or personality, it does not matter," Mann Borgese concluded. "Was it not her founder Himself who said that only he who throws away his life will find it?"

—Richard Kreitner



Eric Alterman



Inequality in Campaign Mode

Americans are deeply worried about a problem politicians can't seem to define.

Were it not for Trumpmania, we might be using this endless election season to discuss the fact that economic inequality has finally risen to the top of the list of most Americans' concerns. In a recent ABC/*Washington Post* poll, 68 percent agreed that we live in a country whose economic system favors the rich rather than the rest of us. (About half of Republicans agreed with this too.) In another poll, fully 83 percent called the nation's wealth gap a problem, with a majority terming it "a major problem." Meanwhile, Gallup has seen a steady majority in the number who respond positively to its 30-year inquiry: "Do you think our government should or should not redistribute wealth by heavy taxes on the rich?" And the Pew Research Center recently found that 69 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the federal government should do "a lot/some" to reduce the income gap.

While it would be wrong to imply that the mainstream media are ignoring economic inequality, Americans remain sadly uninformed about the severity of the problem. A study recently published in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* asked Americans to guess the ratio between the average *Fortune* 500 CEO's earnings and their workers' wages. The average estimate: 30 to 1. The truth: 354 to 1.

When the conversation is not overwhelmed by talk of "anchor babies" and Mexican murderers, Republicans are occasionally asked to address inequality. Some attack the banks, while others fulminate against the Fed or the Export-Import Bank. A few complain about corporate welfare. All of them attack Obama. One suspects that in this case, if not any others, Rand Paul was speaking for the pack when he explained: "Income inequality is due to some people working harder and selling more things.... We all end up working for people who are more successful than us." He went on to add: "And that's a good thing." (Unique among his rivals, Donald Trump has called for higher taxes on the wealthy, especially hedge-fund managers and others who use the "carried interest" loophole to pay a fraction of the rate paid by wage earners.)

Almost never, however, is inequality tied to the myriad problems it causes in public and private

life, to say nothing of the mockery it makes of the American Dream. To the GOP hopefuls, addressing the problem is as simple as stimulating growth. As Jeb Bush told *National Journal*, "If you're not growing the economy, you're not going to deal with income inequality." Almost always, Barack Obama is blamed for standing in the way.

Bernie Sanders is obviously talking a great deal about inequality, though even his signature issue has been overshadowed by the controversy caused by the Black Lives Matter interruptions (and shutdowns) of his speeches, along with less serious distractions. This is deeply unfortunate, because Sanders is seeking to start a conversation that we have never before had in this country. Unlike pretty much every other serious candidate for national office in the past century (at least), Sanders is not "pro-growth" per se. As Jim Tankersley pointed out on *The Washington Post's* Wonkblog, Sanders believes that "unchecked growth—especially

when 99 percent of all new income goes to the top 1 percent—is absurd." He has no interest in "growth for the sake of growth." Instead, he seeks to foster "a society that provides a high quality of life for all of our people." This will require the assertion of healthcare, childcare, and educational opportunity as fundamental rights, for starters. Sanders is also highlighting the destructive impact of unchecked growth on climate change and other environmental issues. He judges elite arguments about economic efficiency as simple corporate manipulation: "They're efficient for the people who own the corporations. They're not particularly efficient for the people who have been thrown out on the street."

So how do these issues get treated in the mainstream media? *The New York Times Magazine* published an interview with the candidate in which Ana Marie Cox asked, "Do you think it's fair that Hillary's hair gets a lot more scrutiny than yours



When the conversation is not overwhelmed by talk of "anchor babies," Republicans are occasionally asked to address inequality.



Chris Matthews.
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Presidential Campaign Trail
Waco, Texas

HARDBALL

WITH CHRIS MATTHEWS

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ET

 MSNBC

Clinton has embraced a number of positions that go some of the way down the path that Sanders and his supporters have blazed.

does?” Sanders had to repeat the question to make sure he wasn’t hearing things, then felt it necessary to explain: “Ana, I don’t mean to be rude here. I am running for president of the United States on serious issues, OK? Do you have serious questions?”

Amazing as it may be, this exchange was hardly atypical of the mainstream media’s coverage. ABC’s George Stephanopoulos felt compelled to remind Sanders that he was a socialist before asking for a model of his preferred government. When Sanders named the Scandinavian nations, Stephanopoulos mocked his response: “I can hear the Republican attack ad right now: ‘He wants America to look more like Scandinavia.’” Bernie’s reply: “And what’s wrong with that? What’s wrong when you have more income and wealth equality? What’s wrong when they have a stronger middle class in many ways than we do?”

Sanders is surging, but he is not going to win the nom-

ination, much less the presidency. He is succeeding, however, in doing what Ralph Nader refused to try, which is to force the likely Democratic nominee to address the concerns of the majority of voters over those of the tiny percentage of extremely wealthy people who typically fund both parties’ campaigns. Hillary Clinton began her official campaign with a strong focus on inequality in her speech on New York City’s Roosevelt Island. She has since embraced a number of positions that go some of the way down the path that Sanders and his supporters have blazed, especially regarding tougher talk than expected vis-à-vis Wall Street. But talk is famously cheap on the campaign trail (as Donald Trump demonstrates better than anyone). The question facing both Sanders and the mainstream media is: How can the eventual nominees be held to account to ensure that they address the crisis once the crowds have gone home? ■



 **FIVE BOOKS/NATHAN SCHNEIDER**

Classics of Catholic Economics

In this issue, **Nathan Schneider** writes about Pope Francis’s economics (page 23). Here, he recommends five books of Catholic thought that display strikingly similar concerns to those of secular activists today. Each one emphasizes the wisdom of ordinary people. “In church each week,” Schneider says, “I learn Catholic economics from the diversity of classes and colors who meet under the image of an executed radical.”



Francis and Clare: The Complete Works

Translated by Regis J. Armstrong

Paulist Press, 1988

This essay collection brings together the complete works of two of Catholicism’s greatest proponents of virtuous poverty. Francis of Assisi, from whom the present pope took his name, brought renewal to the medieval church by stressing the wisdom of poverty over that of wealth. His friend Clare, who founded the women’s order of Franciscans (subsequently called the Poor Clares), fiercely defended that vision. She insisted that her sisters should govern themselves and reminded them: “The Lord often reveals what is best to the lesser [among us].”

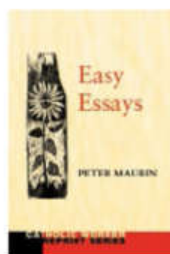


Distributive Justice: The Right and Wrong of Our Present Distribution of Wealth

by John A. Ryan

1916

In the ongoing labor strife before the New Deal, Minnesota-born Monsignor Ryan was a prominent defender of such radical proposals as a minimum wage and shorter working hours. In *Distributive Justice*, he surveys democratic, cooperative enterprises and finds in them not only efficiency and justice but “the mechanism and the atmosphere for a greater development of the altruistic spirit than is possible under any other economic system.”



Easy Essays

by Peter Maurin

Franciscan Press, 1977

Born to a family of poor farmers in France, Maurin went on to cofound the Catholic Worker movement with Dorothy Day in New York City, championing its agrarian tendency. He wrote melodic, didactic poems that extolled “a philosophy so old that it looks like new”—including notions toxic to industrial capitalism, such as the ancient prohibition on usury and the need for local communities to organize, govern, and feed themselves.

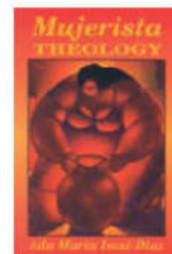


Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered

by E.F. Schumacher

Harper Perennial, 1989

This standby of dusty bookstores appeared in 1973, two years after its author, a prominent British economist, converted to Catholicism. He quotes Pope Pius XI, but there’s also a chapter on “Buddhist economics.” Prefiguring Pope Francis, Schumacher recognized the failure of mainstream economics to account for the natural world and outlined an economy that rests not on maximizing production or accumulation, but on the pursuit of balance and communal flourishing.

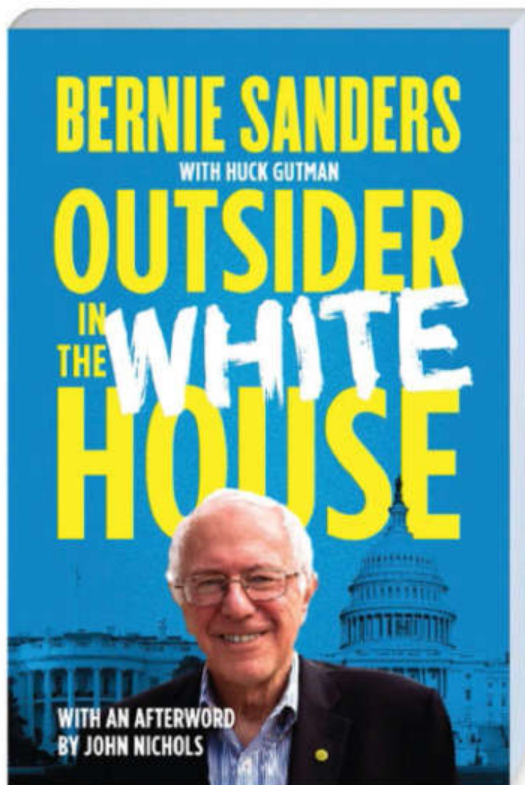


Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the 21st Century

by Ada María Isasi-Díaz

Orbis Books, 1996

On the basis of ethnographic interviews rather than abstract reflection, Cuban theologian Isasi-Díaz developed a branch of liberation theology that centers on the lived experience and faith of Latina women. She looked to the margins of society, as Clare and Francis did, to renew a religion often employed to marginalize. Rejecting trickle-down logic, this method begins with hearing the wisdom of the poor and practicing solidarity with their struggles.



Outsider in the White House

by Bernie Sanders

Afterword by John Nichols

THE POLITICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE INSURGENT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

"I endorse Brother Bernie Sanders because he is a long-distance runner with integrity in the struggle for justice for over fifty years." —Cornel West, author of *Race Matters*

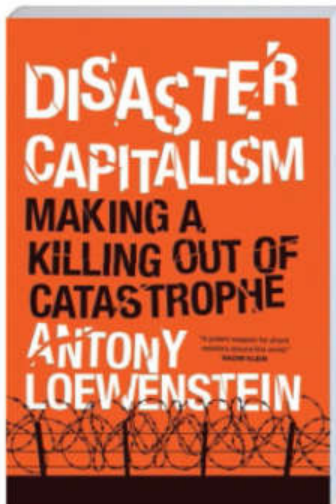
"Bernie's been in the forefront of all the crucial environmental fights of recent years." —Bill McKibben, cofounder 350.org

"Bernie is the real thing. He's about an unwavering commitment to basic justice, equality and sound financial sense." —Ben Cohen, cofounder of Ben & Jerry's

"Bernie Sanders speaks for me—he is clear and he votes with conviction and morality." —Susan Sarandon

COMING THIS MONTH

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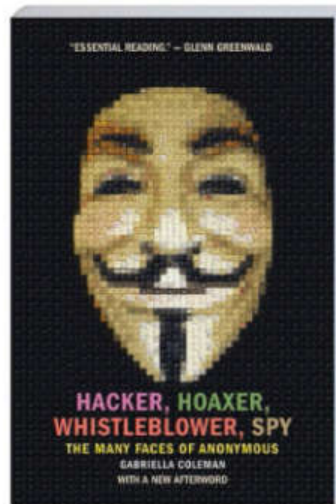
Disaster Capitalism

Making a Killing out of Catastrophe
by Antony Loewenstein

"A keenly observed and timely investigation into rampant resource plunder, privatized detention centers, and an array of other forms of corporate rapacity on four continents." —Naomi Klein, author of *This Changes Everything*

"Chilling study, based on careful and courageous reporting." —Noam Chomsky

On sale September 15th, 2015

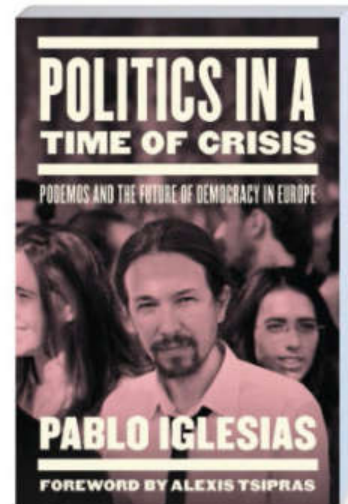


Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy
The Many Faces of Anonymous
by Gabriella Coleman

"Essential reading." —Glenn Greenwald

"Nuanced and compelling." —Astra Taylor, *Bookforum*

Paperback edition on sale
October 6th, 2015



Politics in a Time of Crisis
Podemos and the Future of Democracy in Europe
by Pablo Iglesias

Foreword by Alexis Tsipras

"Iglesias and his Podemos party are radically shaking up Spain's political establishment." —*New York Times*

On sale November 3rd, 2015

BUZZWORD

“Reverse Racism”

“Reverse racism,” a term popularized by right-wing politicians and white college applicants new to rejection, entered the vernacular during a period of intense division within the civil-rights movement. The Lowndes County Freedom Organization was formed in 1965, in a county in Alabama wracked by racist violence. Frustrated by the less-aggressive tactics of groups like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the LCFO struck out on its own to secure an “all-black government” in the county. Hosea Williams, a member of the SCLC and longtime MLK confidant, accused the LCFO of reverse racism and questioned whether its supporters “planned to treat white folks like the white folks treated them?” The LCFO was short-lived, but it laid the groundwork for the Black Panther Party’s rise. As black nationalists fought oppression “by any means necessary,” white liberals and conservatives cried racism, forgetting that racism describes systemic oppression, not the bruising of the white ego. That misunderstanding was recently articulated by Brooke Hogan, the daughter of former WWE star Hulk Hogan, while defending her father’s racist rant: “I’ve had a black guy call me a honky, and I’ve also been told that white people smell like bologna.” Hopefully, Hogan has recovered.

COLE DELBYCK



Patricia J. Williams



The Confederate Mash-Up

What does it mean to remix a notorious Southern icon?

It was flying from the back of a souped-up pickup truck: the largest Confederate flag that I have ever seen, big as a bedspread. Across the center of the Battle Flag was emblazoned the image of a gigantic black assault rifle; across the bottom was written a challenge: COME AND TAKE ME. I watched the truck proceed down the freeway like a perverse Mardi Gras float; it emerged from the peripheral field on my left side, whipped past, then continued down the highway and away, through the mountain pass beyond and into the V-shaped cleft of the horizon.

This happened in August, a busy month for racial conversation: the March on Washington, Hurricane Katrina, Michael Brown’s death. This also happened within days of Elisabeth Hasselbeck’s apparent attempt to Willie Horton-ize #BlackLivesMatter in time for the next election by labeling it a “hate group.” It was just days after Megyn Kelly’s assertion that black communities are “anti-cop. It’s sort of—people have called it the ‘thug mentality’.... That it’s cool to sort of hate the cops...and be somebody who doesn’t necessarily prize being there for your family, and so on.”

That fiercely flapping flag I saw was a mash-up: a remix, a derivative conjoining of different elements to make a new whole. I read those elements as misplaced belligerence about the “War of Northern Aggression” (we were, after all, in the North, a mere hour’s drive from the Canadian border) and a scary degree of allegiance to dark, murderous machinery.

At home later that evening, I chanced upon a YouTube video that I am eager to share: an ad for BuyConfederateFlagsFromABlackGuy.com. The video advertises, in the words of James Joiner in The Daily Beast, taking “some of the guilt out of flying your colors by giving you good ol’ boys and girls the chance to shoot down that pesky racism argument right out of the gate—by supporting a black-owned business. It’s like having a ‘best friend who’s black,’ only better,” because you can order online and needn’t come into contact with anyone outside your “racially pure bloodline.”

The site is parodic—but truth be told, it’s hard

to tell sometimes. After all, George Zimmerman is selling his paintings of the Confederate flag to support a “Muslim-free” gun store in Florida. And there are a few African-Americans who seem genuinely content to be standard-bearers for the antebellum South: Byron Thomas, a black undergraduate at the University of South Carolina, is rumored to have been offered membership in the Ku Klux Klan after waging a brave fight to display the Confederate flag in his dorm.

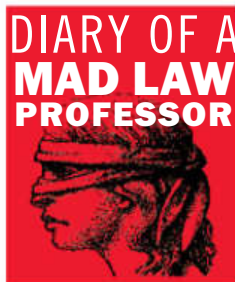
I have nothing against Southern heritage. If it’s down-home, Southern Gothic nostalgia you want to celebrate, then by all means, mash up a flag to that: perhaps one with buttered biscuits, toddler tiaras, and cottonmouth snakes all nestled against a field of magnolia blossoms.

Seriously: It’s not the Southern romance but the Confederacy with which I have a problem. But the Confederacy, as bears reminding, lost the Civil War. The American flag—the one to which we make a pledge of allegiance—is the flag of the United States. That’s a dispositive legal distinction, not a whimsical or emotional one.

The Confederate flag stands for the Confederate Constitution, which was virtually identical to the US Constitution but for one really important sentence: “No bill of attainder, ex post facto law, or law denying or impairing the right of property in negro slaves shall be passed.”

The mash-up of that message with an assault rifle is why I drove quite slowly behind the enormous pickup truck, letting the distance grow between it and me. I slowed my car intentionally to let the truck race on, backward into the future.

Recently, I heard Ashraf Ghani, the president of Afghanistan, hold forth in a nuanced discussion about borders, national identity, pluralistic pedagogy, so-called philosophical untranslatables, and



A black student was supposedly offered a membership in the Ku Klux Klan after fighting to display the Confederate flag in his dorm.

the linguist Roman Jakobson's concept of marked and unmarked terms. It was so impressive and sophisticated that I confess my brain wandered sideways to a parallel universe in which any given American politician brought such insight to the crisis at our own borders. We need more than Donald Trump as American interlocutor in these crucial global debates. It was this sad thought that weighed on me as I drove slowly in the wake of that enormous Confederate death threat, cowering at what ex post facto bill of attainder might await around the bend.

Black lives matter. Confederate lives matter. Mexican lives matter. Syrian lives matter. Iraqi and Turkish lives matter. Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist lives matter. Police lives matter. Swedish lives matter. Cecil the lion's life matters.

But power matters too. All lives are not treated with the same care, but are

received differently as we cross from neighborhood to neighborhood, nation to nation, one social setting to another. In their rejoinder that "All lives matter," the newly visible ranks of neo-Confederates ignore the responsibilities of power, instead labeling dissent as a "hatred of us." They avoid the hard question lurking just beneath the surface: Who defines "us"?

The reality of our resource-stretched and war-torn globe is that the categories in which we put people—legal or illegal, refugee or economic migrant, black or white—determine survival. We struggle for ground and bread and fresh water. We draw down the gates, pull up the drawbridges. We pray and pack in for a place on the freedom train—which grinds to a halt when "they" climb aboard. We take each lost life and stack it as a win or a loss for "our" people.

All lives do not matter when we must sort the dead by sides. ■

Calvin Trillin Deadline Poet

KIM DAVIS

The Rowan County clerk, Kim Davis,
Believes that Jesus came to save us,
And her beliefs she would betray
OK'ing marriage that is gay.
The judge said, when he heard her tale,
Just do it, quit, or go to jail.
When she said no, he didn't blink:
He tossed Kim Davis in the clink.
Ted Cruz and others now suggest
That Christians find themselves oppressed
For heeding a divine authority.
Poor Christians—an oppressed majority.

SNAPSHOT/LAZAR SIMEONOV

Proof of Life

At TheNation.com, Jesse Rosenfeld's report "This Is What Greece's Refugee Crisis Really Looks Like" includes rich photographs of the struggles of migrants entering Greece. Here, refugees take pictures to chronicle their arrival on the Greek island of Lesbos. Some migrants have sent selfies back to their families to prove that they survived the voyage.



The Nation.



THE CLIMATE- JUSTICE POPE

Francis, embracing climate science and liberation theology, throws down a radical challenge.

by WEN STEPHENSON



Wen Stephenson
is the author of
*What We're
Fighting
for Now Is
Each Other:
Dispatches
From the Front
Lines of Climate
Justice*, out next
month from
Beacon Press.

IT MUST BE A LITTLE DISORIENTING, AS A Democrat heading into primary season, to wake up one morning and find yourself to the right of the pope. And not just any pope, but a wildly popular rock-star pope, whose favorables even among non-Catholics are sky-high. Yet that is the situation in which most Democrats, and certainly presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton, find themselves on the question of climate change as Francis comes to the United States in September to address Congress and the United Nations.

Since June, when the pope released *Laudato si'* (Praise Be to You), his epic encyclical on ecology, climate, and economic justice (its title taken from a canticle of St. Francis of Assisi), media coverage has focused obsessively on what it all means for climate-science-denying Republicans. Alas, this sets the bar a bit low—and lets liberals and lefties off the hook. Because equally important is the challenge that the pope's message presents to those who purport to take climate change and its threat to humanity, especially the poor and the young, at all seriously. It's fair to say that Democrats at the national level, and many others up and down the left side of the spectrum, have yet to fully embrace the urgency of climate justice as an organizing principle—perhaps *the* organizing principle—of our politics and, indeed, our society. And make no mistake: Francis, as he brings a message merging ecology and liberation theology, is the climate-justice pope.

It's important, of course, for those who care about the climate not to romanticize this moment, or this pope. Francis is not our climate savior. (Nobody is.) He does not walk on water. However sincere and compassionate he may be (and he appears to be both), in his role as the pope he's a politician, a world leader at the head of a rich, powerfully influential, and entirely human—that is, deeply fallible—global institution. And he presides over a conservative theological tradition whose teachings on gender, sexuality, marriage, contraception, and abortion are, to many of us, and women in particular, not only wrong but oppressive. For these and other reasons, his ability to single-handedly reshape climate politics, especially in this country, is limited, to say the least.

What's more, the substance of his encyclical offers nothing particularly new. Francis is hardly the first religious leader, or even the first pope, to frame ecology and climate in moral and theological terms—a view widely accepted among the world's religions—or to make the case for climate justice. To be honest, when I learned that Francis would issue an “unprecedented” papal encyclical linking climate and poverty, my first reaction was something like “Wonderful! It's about time.” Yes, his predecessors John Paul II and Benedict XVI (called by some the “green pope”) said some good things about protecting creation and the poor, and the inseparability of the two, and the Vatican has long been on the side of climate science. But it seems fair to ask why it's taken so long for the Roman Catholic Church to step up in such a strong way. It's 2015, not 1995 or 2005. The pope's engagement is certainly a welcome boost in advance of the crucial UN conference in Paris this December—and, who knows, may yet help

to change the game in Paris and beyond. But in truth, this is long overdue. Late in the fourth quarter, the clock running down, it looks a lot like a Hail Mary.

Nevertheless, what is surprising and undeniably significant about Francis's message is the forceful way he foregrounds a radical systemic analysis of the deep structural causes of the climate and ecological crisis, the kind of radical response required, and the political and economic forces standing in the way. In the process, he echoes what climate-justice advocates have been saying for decades. In fact, perhaps most remarkable is the way Francis has made this bracing argument for climate justice, with an explicit "preferential option for the poor"—the essence of a once-suspect and marginalized liberation theology—central to his papacy, indeed to the very mission of the church in the 21st century.

NO DOUBT MANY MAINSTREAM AMERICAN Catholics, especially those attempting to occupy an increasingly untenable middle ground, don't know quite what to do with this pope's radicalism. In the run-up to the encyclical's release—a many-months-long, carefully choreographed PR rollout unlike anything Vatican observers could recall—there was a tendency among centrist and liberal commentators to downplay its politics, as if any acknowledgment that the pope has an ideology as well as a theology would somehow discredit or demean him. "The encyclical will not be primarily a political call for action.... It will be a theological meditation," wrote *The Boston Globe's* John Allen Jr., a knowledgeable and respected Vatican watcher, in the weeks before publication, as he set about debunking the "myth" that Francis is a leftist. "He's not Che Guevara in a cassock," quipped Allen.

While it's true that Pope Francis is no Marxist-Leninist guerrilla leader seeking violent revolution, it is also the case that he has embraced liberation theology, and its deep critique of structural economic injustice and oppression, with open arms. This is the same pope who wrote, in his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel): "Today we also have to say 'Thou shalt not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills." Yes, this summer's encyclical is first a theological and moral document—but it is also, inescapably, a deeply political one.

Among the first things that Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio did upon becoming Pope Francis in March 2013, as Harvey Cox noted in these pages ["Is Pope Francis the New Champion of Liberation Theology?," January 6/13, 2014], was to invite the Peruvian priest and theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, considered the father of liberation theology, to Rome. Then, in another much-discussed gesture last spring, Francis cleared the way for the beatification of Oscar Romero, the mar-



Helping the homeless: Francis with children of the Anak-Tnk Foundation in the Philippines in January.

“Francis isn’t a name; it’s a plan for a Church that is poor, simple, gospel-centered, and devoid of all power.”

—Leonardo Boff, a founder of liberation theology

tyred Salvadoran archbishop who was gunned down at the altar by a right-wing death-squad sharpshooter in 1980. Such moves are taken as a clear sign that Francis wants to complete a reconciliation between the Vatican and the theological and social movement that emboldened resistance to right-wing Latin American regimes in the 1970s and '80s and became a target of Cold War anticommunism under John Paul II and then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Benedict XVI). That reconciliation has been under way for several years. Ratzinger's succes-

sor as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller, worked in Peru and cowrote a book with Gutiérrez, *On the Side of the Poor: The Theology of Liberation*, in which he calls liberation theology “one of the most significant currents of Catholic theology in the twentieth century.”

Intriguingly, in an act much less publicized than the invitation to Gutiérrez, Francis also reached out early on in his papacy (as reported by his biographer, Paul Vallely) to a far more controversial figure: the Brazilian theologian and former Franciscan friar Leonardo Boff, another of the founders of liberation theology, who in 1985 was silenced by Ratzinger for his criticism of the church and subsequently left the priesthood. Boff is also known for his work on ecotheology; according to Vallely, this was among the reasons that Francis reached out to him privately and asked Boff to send his writings, saying he wanted to publish an encyclical on environmental issues. Boff's best-known work in this vein, an effort to unite ecology and liberation theology, is his 1995 volume *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*.

Many have pointed to the primary role of Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, who heads the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in drafting *Laudato si'*. Turkson's speeches, including his Trócaire lecture last March in Maynooth, Ireland, previewed several of the central themes, in particular the idea of an “integral ecology” linking “concern for the poor and for creation.” And yet the parallels between the encyclical's social critique and Boff's radical analysis—especially his call, in *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, for an “integral liberation, of the human being and of the Earth”—are equally striking. Although Boff and his work are nowhere acknowledged in the encyclical's text or footnotes, his presence seems to hover like a ghost.

“The logic that exploits classes and subjects peoples to the interests of a few rich and powerful countries,” Boff writes at the outset of his book, “is the same as the logic that devastates the Earth and plunders its wealth, showing no solidarity with the rest of humankind and future generations.” Both liberation theology and ecology, he writes later, “have as their starting point a cry: the cry of the poor for life, freedom, and beauty, and the cry of the Earth groaning under oppression. Both seek liberation.”

When liberation theology emerged, Boff explains, “the most salient and challenging fact was not the threat to Earth as a whole but to the sons and daughters of Earth exploited and condemned to die prematurely, the poor and oppressed.” Nevertheless, “the relationship to ecology is direct, for the poor and the oppressed belong to nature and their situation is objectively an ecological aggression.” Pointing to the “perverse logic” of the “prevailing system of accumulation and social organization,” Boff writes: “It no longer suffices merely to adjust technologies or to reform society while keeping the same basic logic.”

“This human catastrophe is liberation theology’s starting point for considering ecology,” Boff concludes. “We are faced with the cry of the oppressed and the excluded.... The Earth is also crying out under the predatory and lethal machinery of our model of society and development.”

Bergoglio, as the young head of the Jesuits in Argentina during the 1970s, had a troubled relationship with liberation theology. But later, when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires, he was known as “Bishop of the Slums,” spending much of his time among the poor and advocating strongly on their behalf. And as pope, he has had no more outspoken supporter than Leonardo Boff. “Francis isn’t a name; it’s a plan for a Church that is poor, simple, gospel-centered, and devoid of all power,” Boff wrote enthusiastically in the days following the pope’s election. “It’s a Church that walks the way together with the least and last.... It’s an ecological church that calls all beings those sweet words ‘brothers and sisters.’” As Boff told Val-ley, “Pope Francis has lived liberation theology.”

IT SHOULD BE NO SURPRISE THAT FRANCIS, THE first Latin American pope and the first from the Global South, where the Catholic Church’s center of gravity now lies, is the climate-justice pope, squarely on the side of the poor and the developing world—a region in which the concept of climate justice, far from being some marginal left-wing cause, is the mainstream majority view. In the encyclical, Francis frames the unfolding climate catastrophe as a fundamental issue of human rights and social justice for the global poor—as well as for today’s young people and future generations everywhere—because they bear little or no responsibility for causing the crisis and yet will suffer, and in many places already are suffering, the worst consequences. It follows, then, that wealthy developed nations—whose prosperity is the result of having already consumed, over the past 200 years, most of the carbon that scientists tell us can ever be burned if humanity is to have a decent shot at a livable climate within this century—should bear the lion’s share of the burden, paying a sort of “climate debt” to the rest of the world, on whose backs they became rich. This means not only slashing greenhouse-gas emissions at a pace and depth far beyond anything we’re seeing now, but just as impor-

“We are faced not with two separate crises... but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.”

—Pope Francis

Demanding bold action: Francis speaking at the “Modern Slavery and Climate Change” conference at the Vatican in July.

tant, providing financial and technical assistance so that developing nations—whose emissions, largely from coal, will otherwise grow disastrously—can make the necessary transition to renewable energy and a new model of sustainable development. The same principle of a “just transition” applies to poor and marginalized communities, most often communities of color, within our own country; climate justice is scalable, from global to local.

“The climate is a common good,” Francis writes near the outset of *Laudato si’*, “belonging to all and meant for all.” This leads him to the approach he calls “an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions.” He explains: “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.”

Francis is clear about the human stakes of the catastrophe. “If present trends continue,” he writes, “this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us.” The rise in sea level alone is a deadly concern, he points out, “if we consider that a quarter of the world’s population lives on the coast or nearby.”

The global climate crisis has “grave implications,” Francis continues. “Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades. Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming.” And not only is justice for the poor at stake, but “justice between the generations,” he warns, adding: “Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice.... Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation, and filth.... We need to reflect on our accountability before those who will have to endure the dire consequences.”

That accountability—or, really, the all but universal failure to acknowledge and act upon it—elicits some of Francis’s most forceful language. In a much-cited passage, read as a rebuke to climate-change denialists and their backers, he lowers the boom on the wealthy and



powerful who obfuscate, obstruct, and delay: “Many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms, simply making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change.” Instead, he writes, “there is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy.” Some countries have made real progress, he notes, but it is nowhere near enough.

This is a stark and accurate assessment, in line with what the world’s climate and energy experts, from the United Nations to the International Energy Agency and the World Bank, have been saying for years. And it should be obvious that conservatives are not the only ones failing—theirs is just the most egregious failure.

If mainstream liberals are serious about the climate crisis, they too need to confront the imperatives of global equity that not only lie at the core of climate justice, but represent the only path to any workable global agreements. “A true ‘ecological debt’ exists, particularly between the global north and south,” Francis writes, “connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.”

Continuing in this vein, the pope goes on to endorse the notion of a carbon budget. After pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere for two centuries, rich countries have used more than their share of “environmental space,” Francis explains, with “repercussions on the poorest parts of the world.” As a result, “the developed countries ought to help pay this debt by significantly limiting their consumption of non-renewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programmes of sustainable development.” Name the last time we heard a Democratic candidate make the case for paying our massive “ecological debt”—our climate debt—to the developing world, as part of a foreign policy aimed at preserving any hope of global stability in coming decades.

There’s far more to this encyclical than the sort of wonkish passages quoted here. It’s a rich theological text, often lyrical, grounded in Scripture and church teaching, as well as in a deeply spiritual regard—owing much to the pope’s namesake—for an ecological understanding of humanity’s place in creation. It also contains a sharp critique of the modern “technocratic paradigm” and cult of infinite growth that have given rise to runaway consumerism and a “throwaway culture,” breeding a “globalization of indifference” to the sufferings of others.

Indeed, at the heart of the encyclical stands a prophetic indictment of the global economic system and its “deified market,” which, while vastly enriching some and lifting many others out of poverty, have led to obscene

Mainstream liberals need to confront the imperatives of global equity that lie at the core of climate justice.



Scolding a church “in ruins”: Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff speaking in Buenos Aires, April 2013.

economic disparities and left billions behind in misery. These “excluded” of the world “are the majority of the planet’s population,” Francis notes. And yet, when these billions are discussed in global economic and political forums, “one often has the impression that their problems are brought up as an afterthought, a question which gets added almost out of duty or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage.” The man who was Bishop of the Slums continues here with quietly controlled fury:

This is due partly to the fact that many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centres of power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems.... This lack of physical contact and encounter, encouraged by the disintegration of our cities, can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tendentious analyses which neglect parts of reality. At times this attitude exists side by side with a ‘green’ rhetoric.

Francis concludes the passage, among the encyclical’s strongest, with a clear allusion to the convergence of ecology and liberation theology: “Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*”

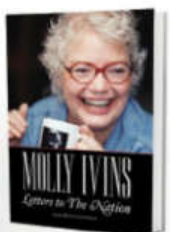
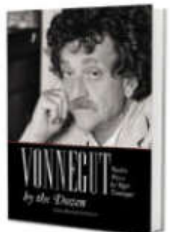
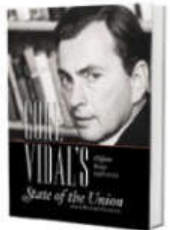
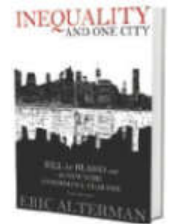
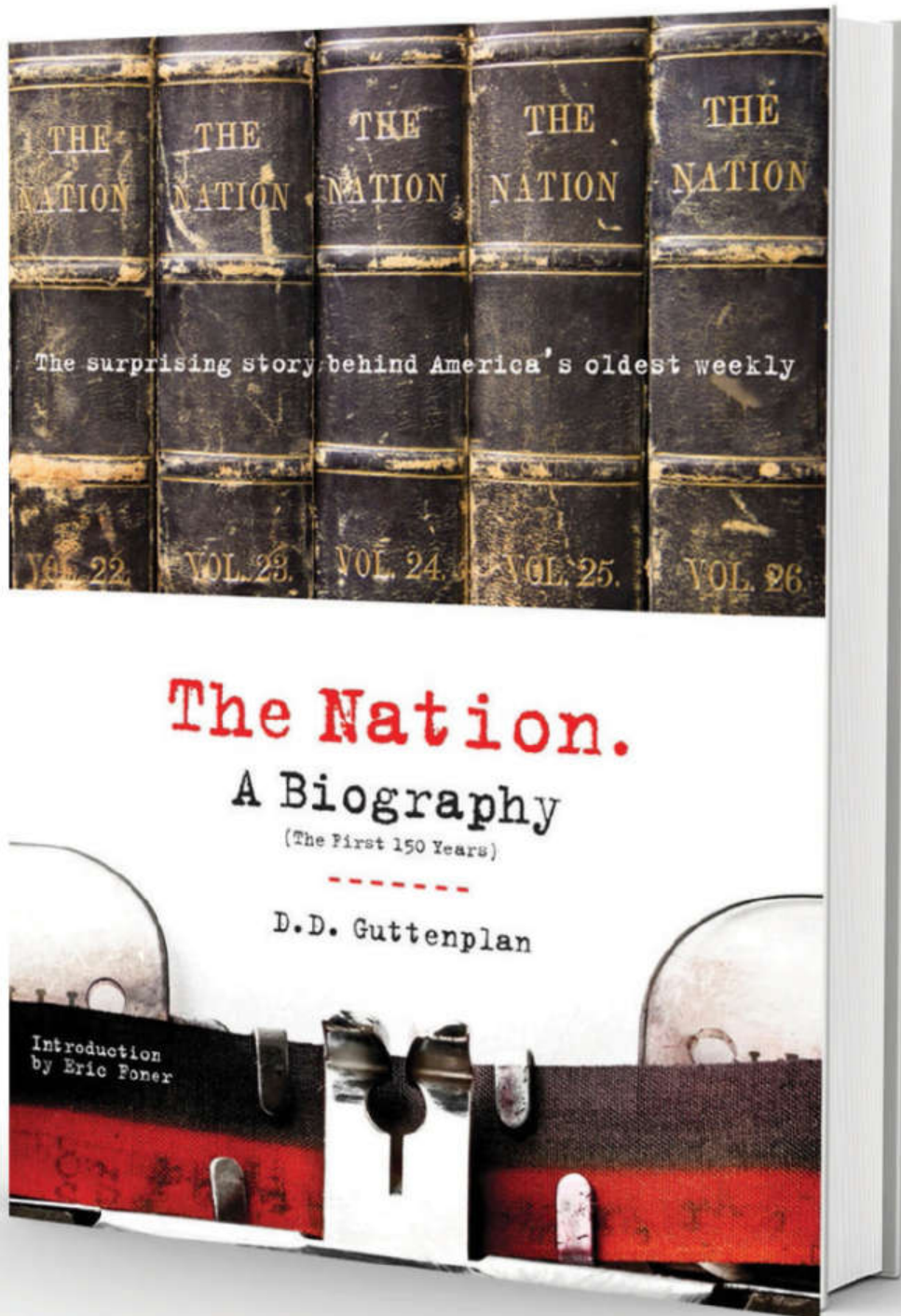
The emphasis is the pope’s. Somewhere, Leonardo Boff is smiling.

NOT THAT THERE’S MUCH to smile about. In the summer of 2012, some 80 percent of the so-called permanent Arctic sea ice was gone, melted. Scientists say it’s hard to imagine the ice ever reforming within any timescale that matters to human civilization. And, as they point out, the stability of the global climate system depends on the Arctic.

Meanwhile, the world’s known fossil-fuel reserves contain as much as five times the carbon that science tells us can ever be sanely burned if we want a planet hospitable to humans. And yet the fossil-fuel industry and its political enablers have doubled down on a profit model that involves extracting and selling it all. Indeed, hundreds of billions of dollars are still spent each year exploring and drilling for more—including now, thanks to Barack Obama, in that newly melted Arctic.

As the world heads toward Paris, climate experts debate whether the 2°C goal—keeping the global average temperature from rising more than two degrees Celsius (3.6°F) above the preindustrial average, beyond which all bets for human civilization are off—has forever slipped away. (In truth, as former top NASA climatologist James Hansen and his coauthors argue in a study published this summer, all bets may already be off, even though we’ve raised the global average temperature by only about

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1°C. Witness the rapidly melting Arctic and Antarctic glaciers—with perhaps 10 more feet of sea-level rise possible this century.) We're told the 2°C goal is still technically achievable, but only with drastic, immediate, and coordinated action by all countries. Of course, nothing close to what's required will be on the table in Paris—but that's OK, we're told, because Paris is merely part of an “ongoing process.” And so we plunge toward the worst-case scenarios, within the lifetimes of today's children.

All the while, American politics proceeds as though this situation were somehow tolerable. Or as though this existential threat—with billions of lives and incalculable human suffering at stake—can somehow be met by business and politics as usual.

HOW DOES HILLARY CLINTON PROPOSE TO close the gap between the politically “possible” (i.e., expedient) and the scientifically necessary? What we've seen thus far of her climate plan—like her proposal to power every home in America with renewables by 2027—is welcome, but still lacks the kind of ambition required. And if she believes the gap can't be closed—if, in effect, she is privately resigned to what's coming—then what does she tell her grandchild? What does she tell the women and children of the developing world, about whom she cares so much?

Clinton has said that the centerpiece of President Obama's climate plan, his executive action to reduce emissions from power plants, “must be protected at all costs”—and her campaign chairman, John Podesta, architect of Obama's approach, has indicated that climate and energy will be among the top three priorities on Clinton's agenda. Clinton herself has said that climate is “the most consequential, urgent, sweeping collection of challenges we face as a nation and a world.” Presumably, then, she plans to reverse Obama's self-defeating “all of the above” energy strategy—under which the huge expansion of US fossil-fuel production cancels out the benefits of his administration's climate policies. And, of course, as Clinton surely knows, even if Obama's climate plan is fully implemented in the coming years (an enormous “if”) and US emissions are cut, as promised, at least 26 percent below their 2005 levels by 2025, that target remains far off the pace that scientists say is necessary—at least 40 percent below 1990 levels—and that the European Union has more or less pledged to meet. (Then again, Kevin Anderson of the UK's Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research has argued that on the basis of science and global equity, which the EU claims to accept, Europe and the United States need to cut emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2030.)

How will Clinton close this gap? Would she approve the Keystone XL pipeline, accelerating the ecologically and culturally devastating extraction of the Alberta tar sands, one of the largest carbon deposits on Earth—as she said, in 2010, her State Department would be “inclined” to

Even candidates Sanders and O'Malley haven't leveled with the American people about the true urgency of the crisis.

Challenging US politicians: Francis's message is an implicit rebuke to Obama's “all of the above” energy strategy. Would Hillary Clinton reverse it?



do, even before the environmental review? Would she hire more oil lobbyists? Would she continue to promote methane-leaking fracked gas? She has broken with Obama over Arctic drilling—a positive sign—but will she keep Powder River Basin coal, with enough carbon to make a joke of Obama's Clean Power Plan, flowing to Asia? Or will she step up and make climate justice—including doing everything conceivable to keep carbon in the ground—the overriding civilizational priority that Pope Francis argues it must be?

Democratic candidates Bernie Sanders and Martin O'Malley have shown considerably more seriousness about the climate crisis than Clinton. (O'Malley even has a proposal to power the country using 100 percent clean energy by 2050—which is a good place to start.) Yet even Sanders and O'Malley haven't really leveled with the American people about the true scale and urgency of the crisis—the need for an all-hands, society-wide mobilization of the sort not seen since World War II—and the full human consequences of our current failure to act. Sanders comes closest, with his call for a “political revolution.”

In effect, Francis has called Hillary's (and the rest of the mainstream Democrats') bluff. While Democrats, and others on the left, continue to pat themselves on the back for not being climate-change deniers, they avoid the radical implications of what the science is telling us—including the need to rethink capitalism and redefine economic growth (see, for example, the Next System Project spearheaded by Gar Alperovitz and Gus Speth). But Francis is saying to them: If you're serious about economic and social justice, as you claim to be, then you need to be serious about our impending climate catastrophe. And to be serious about these things, at this late date, means being as radical as he is. Because the time for anything less has long since passed.

“It is not enough to balance, in the medium term, the protection of nature with financial gain, or the preservation of the environment with progress,” Francis writes. “Halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress.” He is also appalled by the weakness of the political responses to the situation: “We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths. Our politics are subject to technology and finance.... Consequently the most one can expect is superficial rhetoric, sporadic acts of philanthropy and perfunctory expressions of concern for the environment.”

“Young people demand change,” the pope writes. “They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.”

Posing a question that all candidates, of any party, should be forced to answer, Francis asks: “What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold onto power only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?”

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Young mothers at a health clinic in Manila. In 2012, the Catholic Church opposed a bill guaranteeing access to birth control and sex education in the Philippines.

The Pope's Blind Spot

by KATHA POLLITT

The world will never be healed of its economic, social, and ecological ills as long as women cannot control their fertility.

IF THE WORLD CONSISTED ONLY OF STRAIGHT men, Pope Francis would be the world's greatest voice for everything progressives believe in. He's against inequality, racism, poverty, bigotry and, as his recent encyclical *Laudato Si'* made eloquently clear, the rampant capitalism and "self-centred culture of instant gratification"—including excessive meat eating—that fuel climate change and may well destroy the planet. He has a gift for adding warmth to harsh and inflexible dogma, as with his famous comment on gays: "Who am I to judge?" As I write, he has just announced a special year in which any priest may absolve a woman for having an abortion, as long as she is "contrite." No wonder leftists and liberals and even secular humanists love him. Naomi Klein seemed positively starstruck in her *New Yorker* piece about her recent visit to the Vatican, where she spoke at a press conference and symposium about the encyclical. Indeed, she was so impressed with the pope's "theology of interconnection" and "evangelism of ecology," she forgot to mention that he had nothing to say about

affects everything: climate change, species loss, pollution, deforestation, the struggle for clean water, housing, work, and sufficient food. How can we take the pope seriously if he refuses to face these facts?

Pope Francis places the blame for the sorry state of the planet only on excess consumption by the privileged and says that international campaigns for "reproductive health" (scare quotes his) are really all about population control and the imposition of foreign values on the developing world—as if the church itself was not a foreign power using its might to restrict reproductive rights in those same places. But why is it an either/or question? Why not: There are billions of people who want a modern standard of living, which makes a lot of sense compared to the alternative—backbreaking farm labor in a poor village with no electricity or running water—and those desires can only be satisfied if people have fewer children, which happens to be what they want anyway.

True, Pope Francis did say that Catholics needn't breed "like rabbits," but he waved away the need for "artificial" birth control. If only those rabbits would use nat-

the gender inequality that undergirds and promotes our onrushing disaster.

I know I risk being the feminist killjoy at the vegan love feast, but the world, unlike Vatican City, is half women. It will never be healed of its economic, social, and ecological ills as long as women cannot control their fertility or the timing of their children; are married off in childhood or early adolescence; are barred from education and decent jobs; have very little socioeconomic or political power or human rights; and are basically under the control—often the violent control—of men.

For example, consider population growth. Because of its association with coercion, racism, and doomsday predictions that failed to materialize, it's hard for progressives to talk about overpopulation. But we must: There are 7.2 billion people on the planet—since 2000, we've added around 1.2 billion, roughly equivalent to the entire population of North America and Europe. At the current rates of increase, there will be 9.6 billion people by around 2050. Population density af-

ural family planning! Interestingly, he made that comment as he was leaving the Philippines, a largely Catholic country where the powerful church hierarchy has fought tooth and nail against realistic sex education and government funding of contraception. Not coincidentally, the Philippines has the highest fertility rate among the 10 countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

According to a recent report from the Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health at the University of California, San Francisco, providing family planning to the 225 million women around the world who want it but can't get it could meet 16 to 29 percent of the necessary decrease in greenhouse-gas emissions. Doesn't meeting a desire that women already have seem a strategy more likely to succeed than turning the world vegetarian or keeping the new middle classes in China and India from buying cars and taking vacations? Educating girls, keeping women in the workforce, and providing good healthcare for women and children are crucial human-rights goals that also reduce the number of children a woman has.

It's remarkable that the pope didn't address a single sentence of his encyclical to these issues, especially since it otherwise deals so intelligently with the interconnection of so many disparate phenomena. Francis has often said that men and women have different gifts and "complementary" roles. He has spoken sweetly of motherhood and femininity and derided the movement for women's equality as "female machismo." Yet in *Laudato Si'*, the word "women" appears only in the phrase "men and women"—that is, people. Don't women have anything special to contribute to solving climate change beyond serving their too-numerous children less fast food?

As climate change heats up, it's women who will bear the brunt of it, because they are the majority of the world's poor. Especially in the developing world, they'll be contending with drought, food shortages, flooding, and forced migration, along with increases in the usual brutalities like rape, violence, trafficking, and war. Under such circumstances, to deny them the ability to control how many kids they bring into the world is to condemn millions of women to the hardscrabble desperation that the pope says he wants to prevent.

There is a great deal of research on how women's rights, including reproductive rights, can ameliorate a range of global ills, including poverty and ecological disaster. The pope prefers to elide the whole issue, except when it comes to abortion, which he sees as close to the root of the problem: "Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion. How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties?" Given that the church is such a latecomer to concern for the earth—until recently, the standard theological view held that God put nature here for humans to use—there's a certain chutzpah in using this last-minute conversion to push the same old forced-birth agenda.

Never mind the 47,000 women who die every year in illegal abortions, and the even greater number who are injured: Abortion causes glaciers to melt and species to vanish. From Eden to ecology, it's always women's fault. ■

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A Vision So Old It Looks New

*The Catholic Church has espoused egalitarian economics for centuries—
but it's not always the pope who leads the way.*

by NATHAN SCHNEIDER



A FEW WEEKS BEFORE THE RELEASE THIS SUMMER OF *LAUDATO SI'*, Pope Francis's manifesto on ecology and poverty, I had a chance to see the pontiff, speck-size, in Rome. He is the first Third World pope, but the Old World church was very much in evidence. At an outdoor papal Mass, it seemed as if hundreds of variously costumed men stood between Francis and the nearest woman, their outfits representing dozens, if not hundreds, of medieval societies that refuse to go away. It was hard to know whether the pope at the center was in charge of it all or imprisoned inside.

What G.K. Chesterton called "the democracy of the dead" is alive and well, even in the fast times of Pope Francis—a system in which the mere fact of being corporeally alive does not confer on us the power to easily change what the dead have put in place. This can render the church flatfooted and even cruel as the world around it refuses to wait; former Roman Catholics outnumber most religious groups in the United States, a trend that even Francis's popularity has not reversed. But Americans are especially impatient. A more liberal, dexterous, and fashionable church would probably not long claim to represent, as one beloved community, over a billion of the poorest and richest people in the world.

Nor would Francis's broadsides against global capitalism hit so hard. "No one can accept the precepts of neoliberalism and consider themselves Christian," he wrote in his days as Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, archbishop of Buenos Aires. As pope, he puts the matter more directly: "Such an economy kills." In *Laudato si'*, he regards the environmental crisis as an economic-justice crisis as well: "The same mind-set which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty."

This pope, like millions of Catholics, comes from the southern side of the equator, and it was there that he learned how the global economy works. In Argentina, even while in high office, he made it a habit to hear confessions in impoverished districts. "He's a person who comes from walking through the poor neighborhoods, from walking with those who are in very bad conditions, from being with the unions and all that," says Néstor Escudero, a member of the Argentine NGO La Alameda, which opposes human trafficking and organizes cooperatives among victims. Bergoglio lent his presence and protection to La Alameda, along with other groups that faced danger because of their work.

Some of the most emphatic speeches of Francis's papacy have come at gatherings of social movements, including one in Rome in 2014 and another this year in Bolivia. "You, the lowly, the exploited, the poor and underprivileged, can do, and are doing, a lot. I would even say that the future of humanity is in great measure in your own hands, through your ability to organize and carry out creative alternatives," he told his listeners in Bolivia. "I want to unite my voice with yours in this fight," he said in Rome. The early symbolic acts of his papacy—adopting simple vestments and apartments, washing the feet of a Muslim girl in juvenile detention—reflect a formidable and contradictory populism: Go to the margins, call attention to the poor, make headlines for yourself in the process.

Naomi Klein, the Canadian journalist, returned from a summit of climate activists over the summer impressed by how Vatican higher-ups seemed to be listening more than speaking. "They're showing us what rapid institutional

“They’re showing us what rapid institutional change looks like.... [But] one has to be careful not to drink too much Kool-Aid.”

—Naomi Klein

Nathan Schneider is the author of Thank You, Anarchy: Notes From the Occupy Apocalypse and God in Proof: The Story of a Search From the Ancients to the Internet.

change looks like," she told me. When it comes to putting economic justice at the center of environmental ethics, she adds, North American environmental organizations have a lot to learn from this pope. But "one has to be careful not to drink too much Kool-Aid." Francis, after all, largely repeats his predecessor Benedict XVI's teachings on gender as well as economics—except in being more strident about the latter and more gentle with the former.

So does the pope's assault on the economic order represent continuity, or an actual break? Has the content of faith changed, or just its emphases? And how much can (or will) Francis really do? These are ever-recurring questions for papists like me. Having a pope means holding a posture of receptivity toward him—and yet the meek, not the powerful, will inherit the earth, and the poor will rule the coming kingdom. Preserved in the world's most conservative institution is a body of radical notions about economic life: as *Catholic Worker* cofounder Peter Maurin put it, "a philosophy so old that it looks like new."

MY FRIEND RYAN PATRICO, A DOCTORAL student in history at Yale, noticed something curious while studying the German nuns whose convents wound up in Protestant regions in the early, bloody days of the Reformation. He focused on those nuns who refused the option of relocating to Catholic areas where they could practice their faith more freely. They understood their vows as being not only to certain kinds of prayers and allegiance to a pope, but to stewarding a certain plot of land and shepherding the surrounding economy. "Their Catholicism bound them to a place," Patricio writes. They felt their salvation was tied up with caring for the land.

These nuns are a reminder that Pope Francis isn't coming out of nowhere with his often perplexing "small is beautiful" form of ecological economics. He calls for urgency in confronting the climate crisis, while declining to put his trust in modern technology and markets for the solution. His sources of inspiration are seemingly lost causes: the remaining vestiges of indigenous agriculture, cooperative business models, and a call for the mass rejection of consumerism.

Francis speaks from a tradition that goes back to the Catholic Church's ban on usury, or predatory lending, which has been all but forgotten today. Early theologians insisted that the common good trumps any privilege of private property. For all the Vatican's authority over the church (which Francis is at once employing and rolling back), Catholic social teaching proclaims the concept of subsidiarity, meaning that economic and political power should remain as local and as participatory as possible. The basic sites of production should be the household and the community, not some faraway, intrinsically usurious corporation. Catholic tradition helped create certain engines of capitalism, but it throws a wrench into others.

There's no comprehensive school of economics to describe all this. One attempt, championed by G.K. Chesterton and others a century ago, was dubbed "distributism." Italian economist Stefano Zamagni, a leading contributor to the economic teaching of Benedict XVI,

tells me the reading lists at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences have lately included Elinor Ostrom, the Nobel Prize-winning theorist of the commons. Rather than the market or the state per se, Catholic economics often attends to those common treasures in between that we manage for ourselves.

Zamagni belongs to the school of “civil economics,” which regards the notions of a utility-maximizing *Homo economicus* and an impersonal “invisible hand” ruling the market as impoverished visions of economic life. “If all you do is increase growth, you destroy social relations, family relations, and the environment,” he says. Civil economics, by contrast, seeks to evaluate companies according to more humane metrics than just profit and loss, and to identify ways that people can shape the economy with their values.

For more than a century (or nearly two millennia, if you include monasticism), Catholics have been the leading developers of cooperative enterprise. The first credit union in the United States was founded by French-speaking Catholics in New Hampshire in 1908. The world’s largest network of worker cooperatives, the Mondragon Corporation in Spain’s Basque country, was founded by a priest. The US bishops’ Catholic Campaign for Human Development is among our chief funders of democratic, cooperative businesses. Around the world, Catholic Relief Services does the same.

Pope Francis credits his father, an overworked accountant, with imparting to him “a great allergy to economic things.” But from the same source he also remembers hearing, as a teenager, about the virtues of cooperativism: “It goes forward slowly,” his father said, “but it is sure.” In an address to members of Italian cooperatives last February, Francis championed what he called “an authentic, true cooperative...where capital does not have command over men, but men over capital.” In *Laudato si’*, he proposes cooperatives as a means of correcting our distorted relationships to technology and energy grids.

Cooperativism is neither capitalist nor communist, and the same is true of Francis. He’s a leader formed in the skirmishes between the First and Second worlds—accepting neither, and turning to Catholic tradition for older and wiser alternatives to them both. He came of age in the heyday of Peronism in Argentina, and he learned from the Peróns how to walk a kind of both-and line between a Marxist’s identification with the masses and a conservative’s savvy among the powers that be. He identified with “God’s holy faithful people,” both to needle politicians into concern for the poor and to chasten priests tempted to trade their faith for secular revolution.

Laudato si’ was drafted by a cardinal from Ghana and cites bishops’ conferences from all over the world. It calls for international institutions to address the climate crisis and for governments to act. But mainly it calls for a widespread conversion to local economic resistance, following the lead of the poorest and most vulnerable. There’s that papal contradiction again: the most eminent religious figure in the world trying to claim that the real power lies with the rest of us. And it’s true that the best exemplars of Catholic economics have little to do with the pope himself—let alone the Vatican and its scandal-ridden finances—and much more to do with far less visible people putting their values to work where they are every day.

The last time I drove through Kentucky’s bourbon district, for example, there were signs everywhere from the Sisters of Loretto campaign against a natural-gas pipeline slated to run through parts of their land, which they con-

sider a “sacred trust.” Thanks to the sisters’ determination to protect both their property and the planet from extractive industries, the pipeline has been put on an indefinite hold. These are the successors to the German nuns in enemy territory, shepherding their common resources regardless of the inconvenience they pose to the powerful. Another is Corinne Florek, a Dominican nun with an MBA who directs a fund with capital from some 20 Catholic congregations—generating healthy returns, financial and otherwise, from cooperatives and other forms of community enterprise. Her first bit of investment advice: “Stop listening to the Dow Jones going up and down.”

“The culture of capitalism is just so dominating,” Florek says. “We’re asking people to do a paradigm shift.”

THE EXISTENCE OF A POPE HAS NEVER SQUARED well with how we do business in the United States. Principal architects of the US imagination, from Mark Twain to the Ku Klux Klan, railed against papism as a foreign lesion. For a country that calls itself democratic, the notion of a foreign dictator-for-life holding keys to the eternal souls of millions of its citizens disturbs precious longings for sovereignty and the integrity of borders. For a country that identifies perhaps more fully than any other with capitalism, it’s awkward that since the late 19th century, popes have called capital out on the miseries it permits and have asserted worker organizing as an essential outgrowth of human dignity. For a country that prizes choice and individual liberty, it’s baffling that the Catholic Church preaches freedom through constraint and salvation by community.

Explicit anti-Catholicism is mostly dormant in the United States now, but Pope Francis poses no small danger to the American dream. He denounces our beloved trickle-down economics in the same breath that he refuses to reduce abortion to simply one more personal choice; each manifests what he calls a “throw-away culture,” the definition of which overlaps considerably with US culture as such. Francis’s outspokenness rubs in our face the fact that the Vatican is one of the few global institutions not designed to adhere to the strictures of acceptability within US political discourse. Catholics aligned with big business and the religious right, who tended to thrive under the last two popes, have found themselves squirming under Francis. Many local bishops and priests have simply chosen not to highlight *Laudato si’* in their preaching or programs.

Diego Alonso-Lasheras, a Spanish Jesuit priest who teaches social ethics at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, points out: “A lot of Americans, whether they are Catholic or not, wonder: ‘How can he say that to us?’” Well, you’re not the average person he has in mind.” This pope is thinking, more likely, of the confessions he heard for years among the poor in Buenos Aires.

In any event, Catholic social teaching has long proved adaptable across the US political spectrum. Congressman Paul Ryan defends his efforts to cut federal social programs on the basis of subsidiarity; some Catholic sisters lobbied for the Affordable Care Act on the basis of the common good, while others filed lawsuits against it. This is a discourse that no single party can lay claim to for long.



“A lot of Americans, whether they are Catholic or not, wonder: ‘How can he say that to us?’”

—Diego Alonso-Lasheras, Jesuit priest

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Liberal Catholics in the United States have breathed more easily under Francis than they have for decades, but they also know that little has changed in church teaching or practice, especially on matters of gender and sexuality. They want to see Francis, during his upcoming US visit, render unto Republicans in Congress the chastising they deserve. Many look to the apparent miracle of the Vatican's recent role in brokering a rollback of US sanctions against Cuba—though Francis, for his part, denies that he did much of anything.

The real miracle for the Vatican's shadow diplomacy would be in a breakthrough at the UN climate summit in Paris this December. Zamagni hopes that Francis can somehow resolve the prisoners' dilemma of the negotiations, in which each party refuses to reduce emissions out of fear the others won't. Such a *deus ex machina*, sadly, seems more plausible than the possibility that our secular representatives will opt to steward the atmospheric commons on their own.

The Catholic Church has always involved itself in the unholy business of global politics. There is an irony in the institution's determination to survive so as to spread the message of a savior who allowed himself to be executed. Three hundred years after his death, his followers conquered Rome and the empire fell, but the compromises of power also seeped into their church. Survival has involved collaborating with unsavory regimes. The chief controversy of Jorge Bergoglio's pre-papal life was over his actions, or lack thereof, during Argentina's Dirty War, when he would not go so far as to pit the church as a whole against the ruthless regime. One of his own mentors, a priest who chose to live among slum dwellers, spent years resenting Bergoglio for allowing him to be captured and tortured. But during those years, Bergoglio was able to use his position and influence to help many others.

The Roman Catholic Church is an economy of many sectors, a commons of many corners. This is a lesson I first learned one morning in northeast Guatemala, not long after my teenage conversion to the faith. There was an old, small colonial church at the top of a hill near where I was staying. I climbed the steps, crossed myself at the doorway, and sat in a pew, watching as people came and went, going about the work of prayer. I noticed that they would go behind the altar as they did—not a usual place for laypeople to be. So eventually I got up and went there too. The back of the conventional, European-style altar, I realized, was covered in wax and chicken feathers. I'd never seen such a thing in a church, and probably wasn't supposed to; within this ostensibly Romish building, a bit of Mayan culture—an ancient spiritual economy—was insistently preserving itself.

The pope, like him or not, is not the church. The word for "church" in Greek is *ekklesia*, or assembly, the same thing ancient Athenians had in their noisy democracy. The world's ultimate theocrat presides over an assembly of humans as multitudinous and subversive as the feathers in Guatemala, joined in the foolhardy gamble that an institution can accumulate wealth and power for the sake of the poor without losing its soul. The gamble may yet pay off. ■

The KISSINGER *Effect*

The relentless militarism of the national-security state and its perverse justification begin with Henry Kissinger.

by GREG GRANDIN



WHEN I TOLD FRIENDS and colleagues that I was writing a book about the legacy of Henry Kissinger's foreign policy, many made mention of Christopher Hitchens's *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*. But I saw my purpose as antithetical to Hitchens's polemic, which is a good example of what the great historian Charles Beard, in 1936, dismissed as the "devil theory of war"—placing the blame for militarism on a single, isolable cause: a "wicked man." To really understand the sources of conflict, Beard argued, you had to look at the big picture, to consider the way "war is our own work," emerging out of "the total military and economic situation." In making the case that Kissinger should be



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tried—and convicted—for war crimes, Hitchens didn't look at the big picture. Instead, he focused obsessively on the morality of one man, his devil: Henry Kissinger.

Aside from assembling the docket and gathering the accused's wrongdoings in one place, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* isn't very useful and is actually counterproductive; righteous indignation doesn't provide much room for understanding. Hitchens burrows deep into Kissinger's dark heart: The statesman was implicated in horrors in Cambodia, Laos, Bangladesh, Vietnam, East Timor, Latin America, southern Africa, and Washington, DC (the assassination of Orlando Letelier), as well as against the Kurds. Readers are left waiting for Hitchens to come out and tell us what it all means (that is, besides the obvious: Kissinger is a criminal). But Hitchens never does. In the end, we learn more about the prosecutor than the would-be prosecuted; the book provides no insights into the "total situation" in which Kissinger operated, and makes no effort to explain the power of his ideas or how they tapped into the deeper intellectual currents of American history.

Most students of Kissinger find it hard to say anything about Kissinger that isn't about the man himself. He is such an outsize figure that he eclipses his own context, leading his many biographers, critics, and admirers to focus nearly exclusively on the quirks of his personality or his moral failings. His "Holocaust upbringing" has made him extremely insecure, writes one biographer, and what many people mistake as "deceitfulness" is really just a desire to be accepted.

Seymour Hersh's *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*, published in 1983, did capture the secretive world of the national-security apparatus as it

“Henry got Nixon cranked up, and then they started cranking each other up until they both were in a frenzy.”

—Bob Haldeman,
Nixon's chief of staff

existed during the Vietnam War, and his study of Kissinger's paranoia reads like a (somewhat innocent) prelude to the all-pervading surveillance and counterterrorism state we live under now. Hersh gave us the defining portrait of Kissinger as a preening paranoid, tacking between ruthlessness and sycophancy to advance his career, cursing his fate and letting fly the B-52s. Small in his vanities and shabby in his motives, Kissinger, in Hersh's hands, is nonetheless Shakespearean, because his pettiness gets played out on a world stage, with epic consequences. But Hersh, writing in the early '80s, couldn't know the long-term effects not only of Kissinger's specific policies, but also how his imperial existentialism set the stage for a later generation of militarists who, in the 1990s, took us—after a quick detour through Panama and elsewhere in Central America—deeper into the Middle East and then, after 9/11, into Afghanistan and Iraq. Kissinger's shadow is long.

HENRY KISSINGER IS 92, AND HIS LIFE COURSES through the decades like a bright red line, from the jungles of Vietnam and Cambodia to the sands of the Persian Gulf, shedding spectral light on the road that has brought us to where we now find ourselves. Let me stress here (because some early reviewers have already gotten this wrong) that I do not hold Kissinger to be singularly responsible for the evolution of the US national-security state into the perpetual-motion machine it has become today. His extended career, though, does illuminate that evolution like no one else's. In particular, Kissinger was a key player during a transformative period of the imperial presidency, in the 1960s and '70s,

Kissinger at large: Signing autographs for Republican groupies at an inaugural ball in 1973 and, as national security adviser, meeting with Secretary of State William Rogers, President Nixon and then-UN Ambassador George H.W. Bush in 1972.



Kissinger at the White House: In his office as national security adviser in 1970 and, after also being named secretary of state in 1973, walking with Nixon outside the West Wing.

when the Vietnam War undermined the traditional foundations on which it had stood since the early years of the Cold War: elite planning, bipartisan consensus, and public support.

The unraveling of America's long midcentury domestic consensus, which ran from about 1941 to 1966, had begun earlier, under Lyndon B. Johnson. Nixon and Kissinger took the crisis to a new level: the illegal bombing and invasion of Cambodia, of which Kissinger was the architect and executor, kicked off a series of events—including the killing of student protesters at Kent State and Jackson State—that led directly to Watergate and Nixon's resignation in 1974. Paranoia fueled more paranoia. It was Kissinger, more than any other Nixon staffer, who got Nixon riled up about Daniel Ellsberg's leaking of the Pentagon Papers. "It shows you're a weakling, Mr. President," Kissinger told Nixon. He also stirred up Nixon's various resentments, depicting Ellsberg as smart, subversive, promiscuous, and privileged. As Nixon's chief of staff, Bob Haldeman, recalls: "Henry got Nixon cranked up, and then they started cranking each other up until they both were in a frenzy." The "civil war," as Kissinger described the domestic polarization he helped spur, spiraled out of control—and the credibility gap widened into a chasm.

Yet even as the breakup of the old national-security state was taking place, Kissinger—who survived Watergate to continue on under Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford—was helping with its reconstruction in a new form: a restored imperial presidency capable of moving forward in a post-Vietnam world.

There are many different elements of this restoration. Kissinger's off-the-books support of insurgencies and third-party mercenaries in southern Africa, for example, provided a template for the Reagan administration's increasing dependence on secrecy and covert action throughout the Third World, including in Nicaragua. Likewise, Kissinger mastered the use of militarism to leverage domestic polarization for political advantage. He and Nixon repeatedly used brutality abroad to win over racists and anticommunists at home, be it with their massive bombing of Laos and Cambodia or their support for apartheid in southern Africa. At one point, Kissinger claimed that if it weren't for the need to convince Ronald Reagan and other movement conservatives that Nixon was a true hawk, "We wouldn't have had Cambodia. We wouldn't have had Laos." Finally, Kissinger was adept at deploying ever more spectacular displays of violence to shock and awe a war-weary and cynical citizenry. "Let's look ferocious!" Kissinger said, urging Ford to launch an unnecessary military assault on the Cambodian island of Koh Tang to "rescue" 39 merchant marines who had been briefly held by Cambodia.

But neither covert ops nor political opportunism was Kissinger's chief contribution to the post-Vietnam resurgence of American militarism. Instead, his main legacy is metaphysical.

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM CONTRASTS KISSINGER WITH THE crew—Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, and others—who drove the United States into Afghanistan and Iraq. Kissinger's sober "realism" is said to belong to a different philosophical tradition than the heady arrogance of an administration that thought the US military was so powerful that it could "make reality," as one of George W. Bush's staffers, believed to be Karl Rove, put it. Many of the most prominent neocons, in the last days of the Ford administration, did use Kissinger as a foil. They said that he was an appeaser (because of détente), a loser (Vietnam), and a sinner (since Kissinger supposedly didn't believe that America's sense of righteousness should guide its foreign policy, Dick Cheney and others had a "moral-

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ity plank” inserted into the 1976 Republican Party platform).

But conventional wisdom is wrong: If realism is taken as a worldview that reality is transparent, that the “truth” of facts can be arrived at simply by observing those facts, then Kissinger was decidedly not a realist. Of all the policymakers who helped construct the post–World War II national-security state, Kissinger, born in Germany, was perhaps the most cognizant of the philosophical premises that justified his actions. He was deeply influenced by an antirationalist and extremely subjectivist strain of German metaphysics that, considering how often it has been used to justify war and more war, might be called “imperial existentialism.”

In *Kissinger’s Shadow*, I explore how this romanticism manifested itself in his specific policies (such as the secret illegal bombing of Cambodia) and, once he left office, in his constant push to militarize the Middle East. Here are some of its major beliefs: Action creates our perception of reality; the past has no meaning other than what we in the present assign to it; the future is undetermined; and the greatest of great statesmen are aware of this radical “freedom” and refuse to be “paralyzed” by the past or held captive by the overabundance of data and intelligence produced by modern bureaucracies. These statesmen, Kissinger believed, act on hunches and intuition and thrive on “perpetual creation, on a constant redefinition of goals.” It is the responsibility of true leaders, Kissinger wrote in 1954, “not only to maintain the perfection of order but to have the strength to contemplate chaos, there to find material for fresh creation.”

Kissinger has repeatedly urged America’s leaders to make clear what they mean to accomplish with any given action—to, as he put it, understand their purpose. But he found it difficult to define what he meant by “purpose.” In some cases, Kissinger appears to mean the ability to imagine where one wants to be in relation to one’s adversaries in 10 years’ time. In other cases, he refers to the need to create “legitimacy” and demonstrate “credibility.” But these are all instrumental defini-



Kissinger shares a laugh with Donald Rumsfeld outside the Pentagon in 2005.

“Whether we got it right or not is really secondary.”

—Henry Kissinger, on US policy in Southeast Asia during the Nixon years

Kissinger redeemed: With George W. Bush in 2008, and with Hillary Clinton as they both received Freedom Awards in 2009.

tions of purpose. They all still raise the question: Why?

Kissinger is best known for the concept of the “balance of power.” But there’s a fascinating and rarely cited passage in his 1954 doctoral dissertation in which he insists that what he means by this is not “real” power: “A balance of power *legitimized* by power would be highly unstable and make unlimited wars almost inevitable, for the equilibrium is achieved not by the fact but by the consciousness of balance” (Kissinger’s emphasis). He adds that “this consciousness is never brought about until it is tested.” In order to “test” power—

i.e., to create our awareness of it—one needs to be willing to act. And the best way to produce that willingness is to act.

On this point, at least, Kissinger was unfailingly clear: “Inaction has to be avoided” in order to show that action is possible. Only “action,” he wrote, could void the systemic “incentive for inaction.” Only “action” could overcome the paralyzing fear of “drastic consequences” that might result from such “action.” The purpose of American power, then, is to create an awareness of American purpose. We can’t defend our interests until we know what our interests are, and we can’t know what our interests are until we defend them.

Over and over again, in Cambodia, Laos, North Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, and elsewhere, Kissinger plunged into the vortex of his own circular argument: Inaction has to be avoided in order to show that action is possible. He revealed himself as the ultimate antirealist, trying to bring about the world he believed he ought to inhabit (in which massive bombing would break the will of its targets) rather than the reality he was living in (“I refused to believe that a little fourth-rate power like North Vietnam does not have a breaking point,” Kissinger once said). The twirl continued out of office, as he urged Bill Clinton to step up his bombing of Iraq in 1998 as a way of demonstrating American purpose. That’s what he and Nixon did in Southeast Asia, Kissinger said, and “whether we got it right or not is really secondary.”



“WHETHER WE GOT IT RIGHT OR NOT IS REALLY SECONDARY.” It’s not actually a remarkable statement, at least when one considers Kissinger’s longstanding insistence that the demonstrative effects (on Americans) produced by one’s act of will are more important than the consequences of the act (on its foreign victims). Sound familiar? It should, for it is basically the metaphysical rationale of the neocons, of those who believe America creates its own reality—from William Kristol, who constantly complains that Americans have grown too soft, to Dick Cheney, whose “one-percent doctrine” held that if there’s even the slightest chance that a threat would be realized, the United States must act as if it were a foregone conclusion. (An implicit argument of my book is that Kissinger is a quintessential American because American exceptionalism is a form of will-to-power irrationalism, of which the neocons are its highest and most self-aware expression.)

After September 11, Kissinger was an early advocate of attacking not just Afghanistan and Iraq, but Somalia and Yemen as well. He called on Bush to launch a “revolution” in international law, to sweep away antiquated notions of sovereignty. Indeed, on August 26, 2002, Cheney directly quoted Kissinger in a speech on the “imperative for preemptive action” against Iraq. Then, once the Iraqi occupation became a disaster, Kissinger met regularly with Bush staffers, citing his experiences in the Vietnam War as a reason why the United States shouldn’t withdraw its troops.

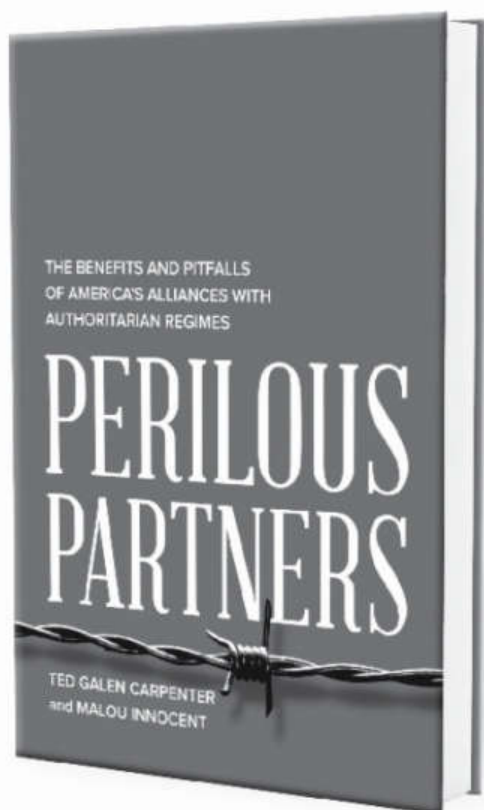
But neoconservatism is just the highly self-conscious core of a broad consensus that reaches well beyond the Republicans to capture ideologue and pragmatist, realist and idealist alike. Hillary Clinton, who in 1970 protested the invasion of Cambodia, recently praised Kissinger, calling him her “friend” and saying

that she “relied on his counsel.” The “famous realist,” she said, referring to Kissinger’s most recent book, “sounds surprisingly idealistic.” Kissinger’s vision is her vision: “just and liberal.” Defense intellectuals and journalists regularly pen essays prescribing a neo-Kissingerian tonic for today’s troubles, but they often have difficulty defining what exactly such a policy would look like.

Often, Kissingerism is defined in negative terms: It’s not the recklessness of the neocons (though, as I’ve tried to show, it actually is), and it’s not the pragmatic overcorrection of Barack Obama, a foreign policy mistaking efficiency for meaning, power for purpose (though, again, Kissinger himself did exactly that). Kissingerism is so hard to pin down, and this, I think, is an effect of Kissingerism, of the rehabilitation of the national-security state and the relentless militarism accompanying it. Constant, unending war—be it fought with the neocons’ zealotry or Obama’s dronelike efficiency—has done more than coarsened thought and morality. It has brought about a dissociation of words and things, belief and action, in which abstractions are transmuted into their opposites. According to Clinton, “idealists” are “realists” and everybody is a “liberal”—and Henry Kissinger is our avatar.

At the very least, we can learn from Kissinger’s long life that the two defining concepts of American foreign policy—realism and idealism—aren’t opposing values; instead, they reinforce each other. Idealism gets us into whatever the quagmire of the moment is; realism keeps us there while promising to get us out; and then idealism returns anew both to justify the realism and to overcome it in the next round. So it goes. ■

Greg Grandin is a professor of history at New York University. This article is adapted from Kissinger’s Shadow: The Long Reach of America’s Most Controversial Statesman (Metropolitan Books).



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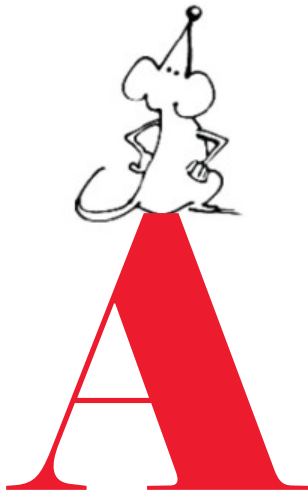
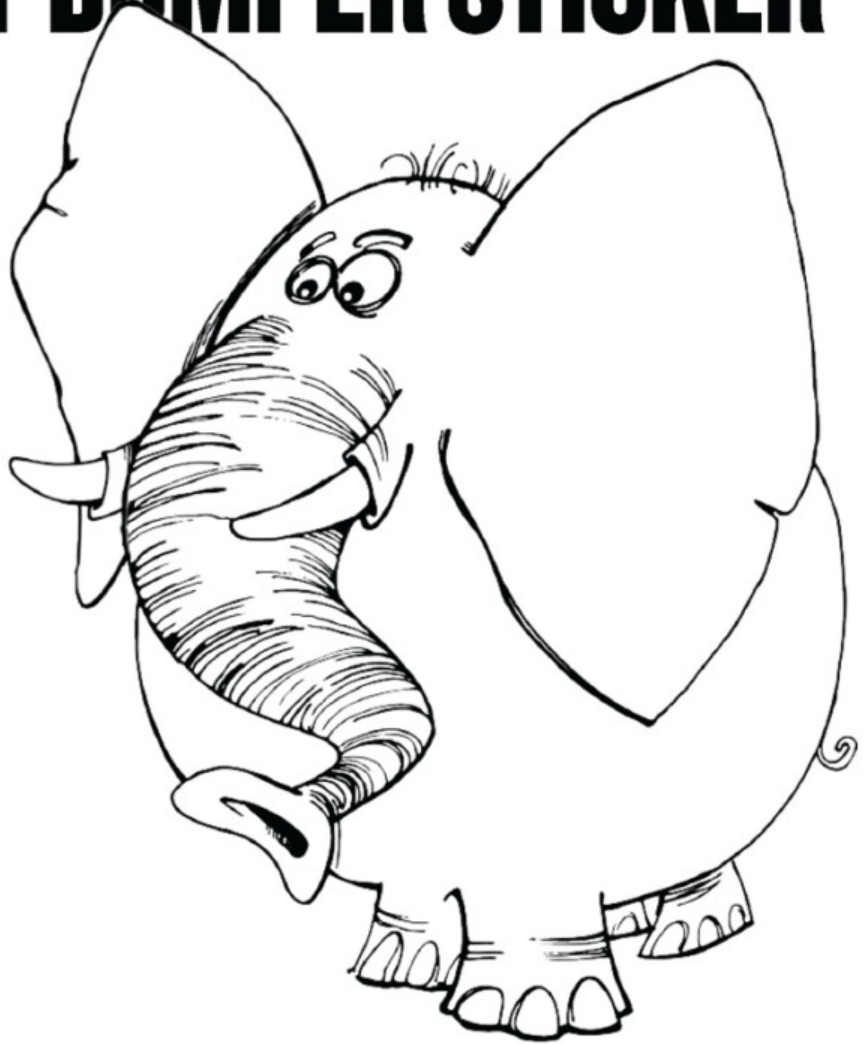
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THE DANGER OF “FOREIGN POLICY BY BUMPER STICKER”

The GOP presidential candidates are calling for senseless aggression, while the Democratic Party is dominated by liberal interventionists.

by KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL



APPEARING BEFORE THE SENATE Foreign Relations Committee in 1966, George Kennan, the legendary Cold War diplomat often called “the father of containment,” criticized the escalation of the war in Vietnam. The United States, he said, should not “jump around like an elephant frightened by a mouse.”

Kennan’s metaphor of the frightened elephant is a strangely apt one for the situation in which we find ourselves nearly half a century later. In the GOP primary, the candidates are calling for a foreign policy defined by fearmongering and senseless aggression. Their agenda includes plans to reverse President Obama’s nuclear agreement with Iran; abandon renewed diplomatic ties with Cuba; escalate tensions with Russia; and deploy US troops to Syria. Much like Kennan’s agitated elephant, the Republican candidates see challenges posed by Iran,

Vladimir Putin’s Russia, Bashar al-Assad’s Syria, the Islamic State and other extremist groups that are far out of proportion to any real harm they could ever inflict on US interests. They are so out of touch with reality that even admitting the folly of the Iraq War is seen by them as a sign of weakness. The far greater danger is the combination of paranoia and hubris that characterizes the foreign policies of the Republican candidates, who would lead us into still more self-inflicted disasters. They would have us rush to embrace unnecessarily militaristic responses to otherwise manageable challenges, bringing yet more chaos to the Middle East and Eastern Europe while costing the nation even more in lives and treasure.

In the latest issue of *The National Interest*, Richard Burt and Dimitri Simes provide a corrective to this foreign-policy recklessness. “The debate over international affairs

is now badly debased,” they declare in the lead editorial, titled “Foreign Policy by Bumper Sticker.” “The quality of America’s foreign-policy discussion has demonstrably deteriorated over the last thirty years.” Remarking on the GOP primary in particular, the authors note that “the very warrior intellectuals who were directly responsible for today’s state of affairs” in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East “dominate the foreign-policy advisory groups of nearly all the Republican candidates.”

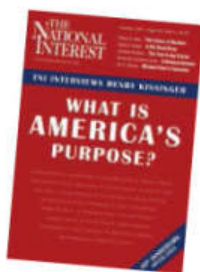
Founded in 1985 by the late Irving Kristol, one of the original leaders in neoconservative thinking, *The National Interest* served as a forum for vigorous debate among conservative intellectuals and policymakers until the George W. Bush administration, when editorials critical of the Iraq War led to the departure of several of the magazine’s most prominent neoconservative voices. Today, the journal is one of the last bastions of “realist” foreign-policy thinking, or the belief that vital US interests should trump ideology, that humility rather than hubris should define our approach to international affairs.

Meanwhile, three decades after the magazine’s inception, the assumptions governing foreign policy are the antithesis of sensible realism. With few exceptions, the political and media elite have accepted as a given the principle that the United States has both the right and the responsibility to police the world—to make and enforce the rules by which other nations must abide, even if we don’t. In the words of former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, “We are the indispensable nation.”

As Burt and Simes write, “America’s new foreign-policy establishment has adopted a simplistic, moralistic and triumphalist mind-set.” And while Democratic leaders in some cases have embraced diplomacy as an alternative to military force and intimidation—namely regarding Cuba and Iran—the party remains dominated by liberal interventionists who share the neocon penchant for triumphalism, as evidenced by much of the party’s misguided positions on Ukraine and Syria and support for the military intervention in Libya.

In 2010, for example, Hillary Clinton delivered what *The New York Times* described as “an unalloyed statement of American might.” Pronouncing the arrival of a “new American moment,” Clinton declared, “Let me say it clearly: The United States can, must, and will lead in this new century.” More recently, a group of Senate Democrats led by Chris Murphy outlined their vision for a progressive approach to foreign policy—and while their statement included some useful markers, they took a similar view of America’s global role. “The new world order demands that the United States think anew about the tools that it will use to lead the world,” they argued.

Reconsidering the tools at America’s disposal, and ensuring that military action is used only as a last resort, is a welcome start. However, our public discourse should also include a robust debate about not just the means but also the ends of our foreign policy. What should be our goals and priorities—and how do we reconcile those goals and



The United States should not “jump around like an elephant frightened by a mouse.”

—George Kennan



Kennan testifies
before the Senate
in 1959.

This article is adapted from a column that first appeared in The Washington Post.

priorities with those of other powers? How do we steer between isolationism—impossible in an increasingly interconnected world—and the recklessness of interventionism, whether of the liberal or neocon variety? How can we best work cooperatively with other nations—even including, when possible, rival powers—to constructively address great crises? As author James Mann wrote last year, “We seem unable to acknowledge to ourselves that other nations of the world do not always need us as a leader in exactly the same way they did in 1945 or 1989. Moreover, in resolving international crises, other nations have become indispensable to the United States, too—far more than they were in the recent past.” The Iran nuclear deal—a diplomatic achievement that would not have been possible without the cooperation of Russia and China—perfectly illustrates Mann’s point.

But if they don’t face meaningful consequences for reckless triumphalism, politicians have little incentive to break with the prevailing orthodoxy, especially when questioning America’s “indispensable” role inevitably results in attacks on their patriotism. The unfortunate reality, as Burt and Simes observe, is that many “accept this form of intimidation by interventionists who substitute chest-thumping for coherent and serious, historically grounded arguments,” while much of the media simply “lacks the interest and the expertise” to present alternative views.

As editor of *The Nation*, a magazine with a long history of adopting alternative views and unpopular stances on foreign policy (ones that were later regarded as common sense), I appreciate the importance of challenging the conventional wisdom. I’m also acutely aware of how difficult it has become in today’s toxic media environment to speak out on certain issues. As Burt and Simes note, “prominent voices dismiss those raising” concerns about “costly international interventions when vital national interests are not at stake” as “cynical realists, isolationists or, more recently, unpatriotic Putin apologists.” This is a form of neo-McCarthyism that deforms our discourse.

So it’s heartening to hear an establishment figure such as Robert Legvold, former director of Columbia University’s Harriman Institute, assert that “degrading the discourse in the United States and coarsening the way the discussion is conducted are clearly not in the country’s interest. One would hope,” he adds, that “responsible parts of the media will begin speaking out against these trends.”

There are indeed challenges that require US action. From chaos in the Middle East to a new Cold War to the great transformation that is happening in China, the world is only getting more complicated. But we need to separate the mice from the elephants, the difficult but manageable issues from those rare crises that pose a direct threat to the United States. This requires a more thoughtful discourse. In 2016, and beyond, we need a foreign-policy discussion as serious as the challenges we face, not as agitated as the crises we have helped manufacture. ■

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(continued from page 2)

published 40 Nigerian writers in two anthologies. I sold the anthologies to the Egyptian Center for Translation. These writers' works will be translated into Arabic.

So, I might be part of Jesse McCarthy's "Negro League" in this country, but in the world, I'm a major player.

ISHMAEL REED
OAKLAND, CALIF.

Jesse McCarthy Replies

I'm a fan of Ishmael Reed's work, which I have always read with delight and affection. *Flight to Canada*, which I consider his best work, is in my esteem one of the finest novels in the canon of postmodern American fiction. My remarks were intended to confirm Paul Beatty's place in a pantheon of black literary satirists, an important tradition of which I consider Reed to be the greatest living representative. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that Fran Ross's novel, *Oreo*, was very nearly lost entirely (New Directions is thankfully, if belatedly, reprinting it this year). William Melvin Kelley and Cecil Brown, despite having written uproarious and challenging fiction, are terribly neglected. And even Percival Everett and Mat Johnson, who enjoy mainstream-publishing opportunities, often receive a tellingly muted reception. I was expressing my concern—one that I continue to believe is well founded—that Paul Beatty's new novel would share a similar fate.

In his letter, Reed actually makes my point for me, by giving an extensive account of how unjustly marginalized his own writing is here in the United States. I completely agree with him that the New York literary establishment routinely ignores black writers and engages in to-

kenism, a harmful and scandalous fact that does much, as Reed notes, to convey "the impression that black talent is rare," when in fact "it's common." Reed seems to take offense, as if he understood my allusion to the Negro League as implying that his work is somehow inferior. But the shame of the Negro League isn't upon the players or its black organizers, but rather upon the racists who kept them segregated for fear of having to compete openly with them. The way I see it, the league that gave us Cool Papa Bell, Josh Gibson, Satchel Paige, Willie Mays, and Jackie Robinson can only constitute a glorious companionship. Reed deserves a wider audience in this country than the one he obtains. I do think that's a shame, but it goes without saying that it is not his own.

PRINCETON, N.J.

Nixon's Protégé?

Thank you, John Nichols, for your excellent, comprehensive portrait of Wisconsin's governor ["Get Ready for Scott Walker...," August 17/24]. I have watched him on several occasions and have been completely unimpressed. At the August 6 Republican debate, Walker appeared to be somewhat sleepy and a bit ill at ease, and gave forgettable responses to all of the questions directed to him. It does not seem possible that he could win at the national level. But, of course, I thought so about Nixon as well.

MARC HERBERT
WALNUT CREEK, CALIF.

Correction

In his column "Our Stupid Politics" (July 6/13), Eric Alterman stated that George Pataki "has not held public office since losing his reelection bid for governor of New York in 2006." In fact, Pataki opted not to seek a fourth term.

Books & the Arts.



Billie Holiday and Mister, circa 1946.

WILLIAM P. GOTTlieb COLLECTION / LOC

Who Loves You?

by DAVID HAJDU

To grasp fully what it means for certain popular musicians to remain popular decades after their birth, you have to calculate the conversion from normal human time to pop-star time. Life expectancy in the United States today is 78.88 years. A pop singer, however, can reasonably hope to survive as a figure of some prominence in the music marketplace for about a year and a half, the typical duration of the life cycle from rising unknown to new face to celebrity to fading star to judge on *America's Got Talent*. A singer can expect to enjoy stardom for approximately 1.9 per-

cent of the lifetime of a regular person; and while human life expectancy grows each year, the ever-accelerating pace of hype and ever-diminishing span of audience attention conspire to continue reducing the half-life of famousness.

America's ongoing fascination with two singers born 100 years ago, Billie Holiday and Frank Sinatra, is extraordinary and speaks to the unique power of their images as artists, their myths, and—above all, I think—their music. After all, Holiday and Sinatra were hardly the only singers born in 1915. The blues great Muddy Waters, born McKinley

Morganfield, may have had the same birth year, though the records for poor African-American families in and around his probable birthplace in Issaquena County, Mississippi, are scandalously incomplete. (Waters himself, at various times, gave 1913 and 1915 as the year of his birth.) Wynonie Harris, the proto-rock R&B howler, was born in 1915, and so were Alice Faye, Ginny Simms, Billy Daniels, "Honeyboy" Edwards, Dorothy Dell, Midge Williams, and a great many more.

Alice Faye? Yes—well, she was one of the top box-office attractions in the country in 1939, when Billie Holiday was just begin-

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ning to achieve mainstream success. Ginny Simms? Oh, sure—she made 11 movies before Sinatra appeared in his breakthrough film, *From Here to Eternity*, in 1953. Billy Daniels, in 1952, was among the first African-American entertainers to have his own national television show, produced in what would later become the Ed Sullivan Theater.

Unlike most of the other singers who arrived in the same time frame, as well as countless pop vocalists and musicians who came and went over the nine decades to follow, Billie Holiday and Frank Sinatra are still solidly grounded in the public consciousness—if anything, too solidly. Our collective conceptions of them both, reinforced by years of replays of a handful of their best-known recordings and regurgitation of the same stories about their robust private lives in books and magazine articles, have served to freeze Holiday and Sinatra in our minds as “icons,” symbols of use for worship or ridicule, but ill suited to serious consideration: Holiday, the drug-ravaged ex-prostitute who croaked her songs in pain; Sinatra, the mobbed-up, Jack-chugging swinger who chewed up life and spit it out. The fact that they were musicians—and great ones, committed to producing creative work that endures as a consequence of their mastery and originality—seems almost incidental now.

In the months leading up to 2015 and over the course of this year, the machinery of centennial celebration has brought more attention to Holiday and Sinatra than they have had since their deaths—Holiday, at 44 in 1959, of complications from liver disease; Sinatra, at 82 in 1998, of a heart attack. (The movie version of the Holiday myth, *Lady Sings the Blues*, produced by Jay Weston, James White, and Motown founder Berry Gordy in 1972, celebrated its star, Diana Ross, more than its ostensible subject.) In 2014, Audra McDonald appeared to critical praise as Holiday in the one-woman theater piece with music *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*. This year, the jazz singers Cassandra Wilson and José James have released a pair of tributes to Holiday on CD: Wilson's *Coming Forth by Day*, an ambitious reconsideration of Holiday material with musicians including T-Bone Burnett and members of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and the Bad Seeds; and James's *Yesterday I Had the Blues*, a more conventional album of respectful, meaty jazz performances, featuring pianist Jason Moran. The biographer and critic John Szwed, author of a superb book about another influential child of 1915, the folklorist Alan Lomax, has published a sober rumination on Holiday's importance, *Billie Holiday: The Musician and the Myth*. And

the two labels with the largest holdings of Holiday recordings, Columbia II and Verve, have both put together centennial-edition collections of her tracks, too, of course.

In honor of Sinatra's centennial, the documentarian Alex Gibney, the maker of smart earlier films about Enron and the WikiLeaks scandal, produced a serious HBO biography that managed, almost miraculously, neither to romanticize Sinatra as the capo of stars nor to sensationalize the macho hedonism of his Rat Pack days. Jazz at Lincoln Center hosted a “Sinatra at 100” concert with the pianist Monty Alexander, who in his teens was a protégé of Sinatra, and the singer Kurt Elling, who has been touring the country (and spots in Europe) with his own tribute, “Elling Swings Sinatra.” The centennial has brought at least three new Sinatra books: a compact collection of poetic riffs on Sinatra by David Lehman, *Sinatra's Century: One Hundred Notes on the Man and His World*; a coffee-table book assembled from materials in the Sinatra family archive, *Sinatra 100*; and *Sinatra: The Chairman*, the concluding volume of James Kaplan's breezy two-part biography. And in the recordings that make the most lucid argument for Sinatra's importance, there's a judiciously curated new collection of four CDs, *Ultimate Sinatra*, bringing together Sinatra's music on all three of the major labels he recorded for (Columbia, Capitol, and the company he started himself, Reprise) between 1939 and 1993.

“He never went away,” said Bob Dylan in an interview with *AARP* magazine timed to help promote Dylan's own recent homage to Sinatra and his tradition: *Shadows in the Night*, an album of Tin Pan Alley standards softly crooned with grandfatherly devotion. “All those other things that we thought were here to stay, they did go away. But he never did.”

Many of the recordings of Billie Holiday and Frank Sinatra must sound irredeemably old-fashioned or weird to listeners weaned on contemporary pop, alternative rock, hip-hop, and other musical genres of recent vintage. Both singers were acutely attuned to the lyrical content of the songs they sang, and no degree of due admiration for the wordsmithing of such master lyricists as Oscar Hammerstein II and Johnny Mercer can obscure the fact that some of the presumptions at work in their songs are artifacts of their time. The attitude toward gender in, say, Rodgers and Hammerstein's “Soliloquy,” with its noble-sounding but demeaning conception of girls as delicate little objects in need of male protection, or Arlen and Mercer's “Blues in the Night”—“A woman's a two-face / A wor-

risome thing who will leave you to sing / The blues in the night”—is unsettling today, and made all the more so in Sinatra’s recordings by the conviction in his voice.

In Holiday’s work, the feeling of deep vulnerability in her voice can be mistaken for an expression of hopelessness, and that becomes tricky when thought of as a statement on African-American womanhood. Among the attributes that give Holiday’s singing its veracity is its fragility, a quality present as early as 1935, when Holiday, at age 19, sang the mournful blues lament “Saddest Tale” in *Symphony in Black*, a film short centered on Duke Ellington. “My man’s gone / I feel so alone,” Holiday murmured, collapsed on the street. “He didn’t treat me fair / It’s more than I can bear.” As her health declined, rapidly and inescapably over the course of her abbreviated life, Holiday’s voice grew more brittle and thin, and she employed its technical weaknesses for emotional effect. By the time of her final recordings—particularly the last album released during her lifetime, *Lady in Satin*—every song sounded anguished, and the myth of Holiday as a tragic figure, a symbol of black womanhood as a condition of hopeless victimization, was set.

This is a myth that Szwed, building on the incisive work of the Holiday scholars Farah

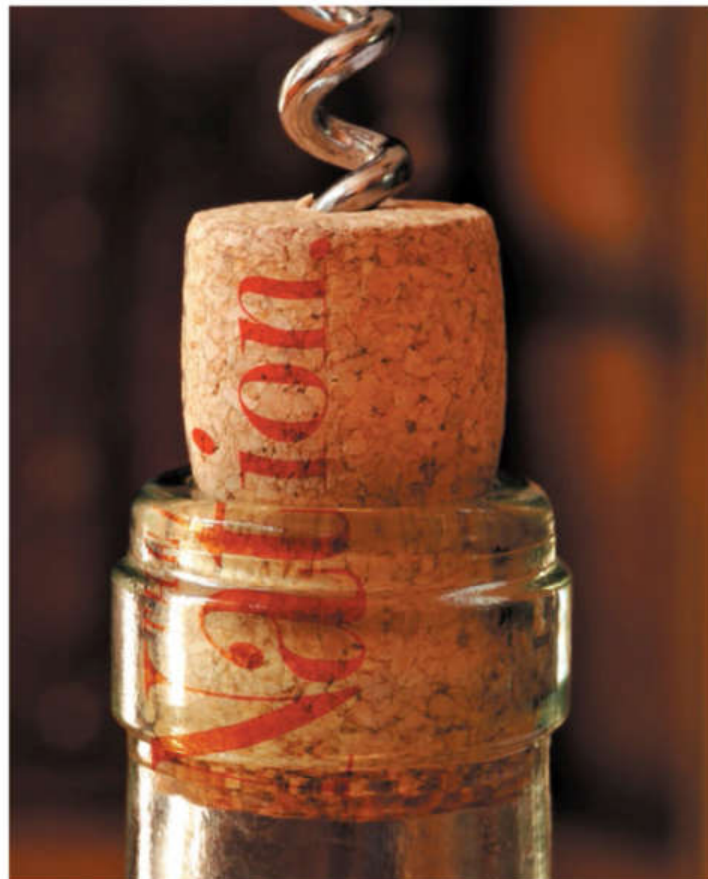
Jasmine Griffin and Robert G. O’Meally, challenges fervently. As Szwed, Griffin, and O’Meally have all pointed out, Holiday was fiercely willful and independent-minded in both her professional and personal life—hardly a victim, if frequently the prey of predatory law enforcement and the institutional inequity under which all African-Americans suffered in her era. Holiday fought all of that, and her singing was the sound of her survival, for as long she could stand, looking smart and stately in her long fur coat.

There’s a quality in some of Sinatra’s music, particularly the punchy big-band records he made with the arrangers Nelson Riddle and Billy May in the 1950s and early ’60s, that is no doubt off-putting to contemporary listeners. For one thing, 21st-century ears are unaccustomed to the chromatic harmony in the orchestrations, and the sound of horn sections today carries associations with reruns of cheesy old TV cop shows, casino lounge acts, karaoke, and the near-impersonations of Sinatra that limited talents such as Michael Bublé and Seth MacFarlane perform for no purpose I can discern. The cocksure exaltation in some of Sinatra’s hardest-swinging tracks, like “I’ve Got You Under My Skin” (from *Songs for Swingin’ Lovers*, arranged by Riddle) and “Blue Moon” (from *Sinatra’s*

Swingin’ Session!!!, also arranged by Riddle) can come across as little more than mid-century male swagger.

Worse, to my ears, is in the sneering indifference that Sinatra could not help but exude when suffering through the recording of Top 40 pop material of the ’60s and ’70s that was beneath his abilities and standards, such as “Leaving on a Jet Plane,” “Close to You,” and “Winchester Cathedral.” You can even hear a hint of this dismissive languor in one of his biggest hits of the ’60s, “Strangers in the Night.” He despised the song for its pandering simplemindedness and resented having to sing it. Yet, contortedly, he did so for the label he founded. There were strains of self-torture in this work more convoluted than anything Billie Holiday recorded.

Sinatra had not always sounded so arrogant. This is not easy to fathom today, yet he first made his name as an artist whose delicacy and sensitivity were seen as shockingly, even dangerously, transgressive. In a three-part series of profiles of Sinatra published in *The New Yorker* in 1946, E.J. Kahn Jr. quotes a critic of Sinatra “who thinks much about these things” as finding Sinatra’s “style very dangerous to our morale, for it is passive, luxurious, and ends up not with a bang but a whimper.” The implication was that Sina-



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tra, as a singer, was not enough of a man.

Rudy Vallee, who in the late 1920s had been an early idol of the microphone age, murmured his songs more quietly than Sinatra and had vocal limitations that made his music sound tenuous and thin. He was commonly derided as effete, though he exploited that fact as part of his comically bookish college-boy image. Vallee used the sexual ambiguity of his singing as a joke.

Bing Crosby, the great innovator of jazz-pop singing whom Sinatra idolized and emulated in many ways, was more musically sophisticated than Vallee and sang with a coolness, an evident casualness, that made his singing sound confidently, almost diffidently, offhanded. He parceled his emotions in his music—a discreetly placed glissando, an occasional trill—from a distance. The low-key naturalism of his delivery came across accurately as restraint rather than weakness.

Sinatra added unabashed sentimentality and male vulnerability to the conversational naturalism and coolness that Vallee and Crosby had introduced to mainstream popular music in the microphone age. These qualities, working in conjunction with aspects of Sinatra's extramusical image at the time, made him awfully suspicious to parents of his young fans (and other protectors of what no one had yet started calling "heteronormativity"). The gossip columnists and the comedians who helped shape public opinion defined Sinatra as much by his skinniness as by his singing. (In a Looney Tunes short from the mid-1940s, *Swooner Crooner*, a character based on Sinatra is so thin he all but disappears behind his microphone stand, and in another cartoon from the same period, the Sinatra figure is so

frail he needs to be pushed around in a wheelchair by an orderly.) After America entered the war, Sinatra's exemption from military service (4-F for a perforated eardrum, diagnosed in his second visit to the draft board, after he was initially classified 1-A) only fed his reputation for unmanliness—or at best, a funny new kind of manhood. In 1945, a song about him was published, with the lyric "Dear Mr. Sinatra you're so tender and sweet and so fine." I once interviewed the pianist Joe Bushkin, who played with Sinatra dozens of times after their apprenticeship with Tommy Dorsey, and we talked about the codes of machismo in pop music of the 1940s. "They didn't know what to make of him," Bushkin said. "They thought you were light on your feet if you gave half a shit about beauty."

Sinatra came to full maturity as an artist in the early '50s, partly by absorbing the influence of Billie Holiday, whom he had begun studying years earlier. As Sinatra explained to *Ebony* magazine in 1958, a year before Holiday's death, "It is Billie Holiday, whom I first heard on 52nd Street...who was and still remains the greatest single musical influence on me. It has been a warm and wonderful influence and I am very proud to acknowledge it. Lady Day is unquestionably the most important influence on American popular singing in the last 20 years. With a few exceptions, every major pop singer in the U.S. during her generation has been touched in some way by her genius."

Holiday professed to have imparted little to Sinatra. In a few brief comments on the matter to the gossip columnist Earl Wilson, Holiday said, "Listen darling, I didn't teach

Frank anything. I told him about notes at the end he should bend, and later he said I inspired him. Bending those notes—that's all I helped Frankie with." The technique to which Holiday refers, the effect of sliding a tone downward into the flat range, suggests sadness or despair—the note descends, and along with it, the feeling. Holiday used it freely, Sinatra sparingly but effectively on ballads such as "Yesterdays" on his *Sinatra & Strings* album, arranged by Don Costa in the manner of Axel Stordahl, a specialist in lush orchestral settings who worked extensively with Sinatra in the '40s.

Sinatra's manner of learning a new song was to read the lyrics, typed out on paper like the manuscript of a poem, before he heard the music. He would read the words aloud, as if they were speech, to absorb the meaning and enable the language to flow from his tongue like conversation. Sinatra was a disciplined musician with excellent intonation, remarkable breath control (especially in the first 15 years or so of his career, before his smoking habit tightened his lungs), an appealing sound (a well-varied and expertly controlled mix of tones from his chest, throat, and head), and a masterly way with mouth and tongue effects (such as holding notes on the nasal consonants "m" and "n," for their resonance, instead of emphasizing the vowels as many singers do). But it was his attention to lyrics and naturalistic phrases—attributes he shared with Holiday and may well have learned from studying her—that made his singing, like hers, especially compelling.

What Holiday and Sinatra shared as singers involved technique, for sure, but also transcended it. The innovation they both enacted was a profound one. They absorbed their material deeply with close attention to the lyrical content, and they communicated the meaning so naturally and emotively that they made popular singing feel like an expressive, rather than an interpretive, art. Internalizing the material and then singing almost as if they were whispering confidences, one on one to people listening alone in their rooms with radios or record players, Holiday and Sinatra made popular music something personal. When they sang, the lyrics sounded like their own words, rather than the work of professional tunesmiths. They collapsed the wall between singer and songwriter by sounding like neither, but rather like people opening their hearts and minds. That, I think, is why the music of Holiday and Sinatra, or at least the best of it, endures. Beneath its jazzy musical beauty, there's the timeless eloquence of truth. ■

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3372

1 CHART + REUSE 6 2 defs.
10 EMU + LATE 11 CON + FIRM
12 NUT(RI)A (*tuna* anag.) 13 VIC(A
RAG)E 14 CAR(YGRAN)T (*angry*
anag.) 16 T(OW)IT 18 hidden
20 anag. (&lit.) 22 ESCAP (anag.) + AD
+ E 24 ADO + BES[t] 26 TR(IV)IAL
or TRI(VI)AL 27 "wholly sea"
28 "Lear" rev. 29 BOOMER ANG[S]

DOWN 1 "croon, ex, wetter" 2 AD(U)
LTERER (*red alert* anag.) 3 TEA +
RING 4 [s]EVEN (&lit.) 5 SAC(R)IS
TAN 7 hidden 8 T(EMPESTUO)US
+ NESS (*use up time* anag.) 9 hidden
15 ARMADIL (anag.) + LO
17 WAS H, B AS IN 19 NAP + KIN
21 anag. 23 C + HIDE 25 W + HIM

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Kosman & Picciotto explain what they're up to at
thenation.com/article/solving-nations-cryptic-crosswords/.



Saul Bellow (middle) after acknowledging his receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature, October 22, 1976.

The Flow of Life

by DAVID MIKICS

During his lifetime, Saul Bellow was the most celebrated of American writers: In addition to the Nobel Prize, he won the National Book Award three times, as well as the Pulitzer. In 1964, his novel *Herzog* was a huge—and hugely unexpected—bestseller, and from then until the turn of the century a Bellow novel landed on the bestseller list roughly every half-dozen years. But now, a decade after his death, Bellow has faded from readers' consciousness, in spite of the aggressive publicity campaign conducted by his British fans, including James Wood and Martin Amis.

The withering of Bellow's reputation is partly the result of academic fashion: Professors now ignore his work, believing it to be a swamp of white male privilege tinged by racism and sexism. These charges are wrong-headed: Bellow had a firmer grasp of social reality than most of his contemporaries; his work did not exclude otherness, but instead engaged with it. In his college years at Northwestern, Bellow was a student of the pioneering anthropologist and African-Americanist

There Is Simply Too Much to Think About

Collected Nonfiction.

By Saul Bellow.

Edited by Benjamin Taylor.

Viking. 544 pp. \$35.

Melville Herskovits, and it showed. His novel *The Dean's December* offers a worried, somber, detailed portrait of inner-city Chicago. Bellow's working-class Jewish childhood in Montreal and Chicago, conducted in a mixture of Yiddish, English, and French, readied him for a multicultural world. In *Henderson the Rain King*, his title character finds enlightenment in Africa, not his native Connecticut.

There's a strong case to be made that Bellow is the central American novelist since Cather and Faulkner. He had a rich comic sense—he might be the funniest of our major writers—but comedy, for Bellow, was the road to moral seriousness. He was an intellectual who refused to traffic in that deadliest of genres, the novel of ideas. He was willing to let his characters stretch out, even take over his novels, especially in *Humboldt's Gift* and his last book, the masterful *Ravelstein*, a roman à clef about Allan Bloom, his friend and colleague at the University of Chicago.

Bellow's generous way with his characters sometimes led to charges of looseness. Philip Roth once observed that something happens halfway through a Bellow novel: The plot goes astray, the structure slackens. This was not because Bellow got distracted. He revised his work compulsively and, when he wanted to—as in *Seize the Day* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet*—could produce a superbly organized piece of fiction. His short stories, too, are often perfect, faux-casual in Chekhov's manner. ("It came out of him like a watermelon seed," Bellow's son Adam said about one of his father's late marvels, the story "By the St. Lawrence.") But for the most part, Bellow chose looseness. He practiced what the film critic Manny Farber called "termites art"—deliberately unkempt, chewing away in several directions at once—instead of constructing the too-polished plaster-of-Paris classic ("white elephant art," in Farber's term). Bellow disliked writing that aimed self-consciously at greatness, the grand poise of a Thomas Mann or André Malraux.

once challenged a friend to open *Herzog* at random and find a less-than-remarkable sentence. She tried the experiment a half-dozen times before admitting defeat.

Bellow was among the most stylistically well honed of the American novelists after Hemingway, but to consider him just a stylist is to underestimate him drastically. Bellow was driven by the idea that style is not merely a veneer but rather the voice of human personality, which invaded his work as it did that of Dostoevsky, his favorite writer. The more untamed the personality, the better. Because of the Jewish cadences that flavored his writing, and because of his devotion to the unruly powers of personality, Bellow stood against the bland *New Yorker* fiction of his day, with its careful ironies—sometimes poignant, sometimes dry, but always so excessively controlled.

Bellow's books stand at the opposite extreme from the currently popular mode known as the "novel of detachment," with its ascetic, isolated heroes [Jon Baskin, "Always Already Alienated," March 2, 2015]. His men and women go all-out; they are talkers, obsessives, restless creators, crackpots, or thugs—sometimes all of these at once. They couldn't be further away from Beckett's pared-down protagonists, or the cartoonlike human contraptions invented by Thomas Pynchon or David Foster Wallace. Neither modern nor postmodern, Bellow is a realist, without the fusty air that the word suggests.

Bellow's universe is physical: People are their bodies and their faces, and their souls shine through their flesh. Think of the actor

David Mikics is the author, most recently, of *Slow Reading in a Hurried Age*. His book *Bellow's People will be published by Norton next year*.

Murphy Verviger in *Humboldt's Gift*, rehearsing at a Broadway theater that looks "like a gilded cake-platter with grimed frosting":

Verviger, his face deeply grooved at the mouth, was big and muscular. He resembled a skiing instructor. Some concept of intense refinement was eating at him. His head was shaped like a bushy, a high solid arrogant rock covered with thick moss.

Or there is Humboldt in his desperate final days: "He wore a large gray suit in which he was floundering. His face was dead gray, East River gray. His head looked as if the gypsy moth had gotten into it and tented in his hair." Every Bellow reader has a mental list of such gloriously precise human pictures.

Diagnosis Inc.

You are two oranges shy of sangria
 You chumpchange in a clackdish
 You the flensed soldier, egg-runny on the inside
 You frogging deadline after deadline
 You caught in a Swiss chokehold
 You feeding the duckboards of Venice
 You the expert on television newswar
 You at maximum voice
 You the squaw above dead deerling
 You the clarion-call of the id
 You the barbaros of Juarez
 You who want to wake up forever
 You on page 65 in bubblegum PVC
 You yelling at the meathook
 You yet to make your wheelspin mark
 You clapping at family stones
 You who would rather be scalped standing
 You as screw of the week
 You eiderhanded as a spider
 You in the stocks and wanting it more
 You salted for planet jellyfish
 You among the angels crisp as butcherpaper
 You scissorless, cutting the line to ribbons
 You the livid escarp
 You the apostle of gutlove
 You with a black and fraying candlestick
 You hard to prove but terminally alluring
 You an owl away from the topmost branch
 You mad as a star
 You who would shoot first

JAMES BYRNE

In each one, Bellow shows how the psyche is right there in the flesh, ready to be seen. In Bellow's descriptions, as James Wood comments, every detail is essential. He rivals even Dickens in his power to locate personality through physical quirks, to explain how appearances tell who we are.

Personality, which Bellow constantly praised, is now in eclipse; what gleams instead is identity. Americans are mad for it, because this is a country in which, we have always been told, you can become whoever you decide to be. We have been trained to wrap ourselves proudly in our signifiers of choice. We "identify as" transgender, mixed-race, Jewish, Hispanic. This is a more subdued and subtle version of the dress-up carnival that Artur Sammler sees in the streets of late-1960s New York: the guerrillas and the long-haired cowboys who remind him of Hollywood extras. Like social media, identity choice is now part of us. But it often remains superficial. As with Humboldt in his suit, we flounder among possible identities. Personality can disclose who you are in a way that social identity cannot. Personality speaks with the voice of nature, while identity swapping is just a conventional game—such is Bellow's argument. It cuts against the current grain, but that's all to the good: We need contrarian voices.

Bellow's thinking about the history of the novel has been almost invisible to readers. Strangely, he decided not to republish most of his literary criticism in his book of selected prose, *It All Adds Up* (1994). But now we have the superbly wide-ranging collection *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About*. Its editor, Benjamin Taylor, who ably edited a volume of Bellow's selected letters a few years ago, bills it as the novelist's "collected nonfiction," which is not quite true: The volume contains some of Bellow's interviews but not others, and some of the essays have been silently chopped down. "Certain of the very long pieces are modified here for reasons of space," Taylor says, but he doesn't indicate what's been left out. (It would have required only a page or two at the book's end to do so.) The absence is acutely felt

in Bellow's fascinating long conversation with Norman Manea, thankfully available as a separate volume published by Sheep Meadow Press. Still, this is a necessary book for anyone who cares about Bellow, which means anyone who cares about fiction.

The most interesting of these essays are those in which Bellow comments on great precursors like Flaubert, James, Dreiser, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway, and on contemporaries like Nabokov, Salinger, and John O'Hara. *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About* reveals that Bellow, along with his friend Ralph Ellison, is one of the 20th-century American novelists who thought most deeply about earlier American fiction, about modernism, and about European realism. Bellow's criticism of other writers is nearly always convincing, and not just because it serves his own purposes, although Bellow clearly has the defense of his own work always in mind.

Bellow's main target is what he calls "the popular orgy of wretchedness in modern literature." He often derides the "Wastelanders," the postwar writers and professors who float in the wake of high modernism. For them, the world of grown-up experience is a miserable place. Thus the popularity of Salinger, he explains in a 1963 essay ("Recent Fiction: A Tour of Inspection"): "The young and the pure of heart are in." His diagnosis is still accurate a half-century later. The American appetite for immaturity that gorged on Salinger's preciousness now swoons over *Girls*.

In the mid-1950s, Bellow was trying to find his place in American fiction. *The Adventures of Augie March*, his third novel, catapulted him to fame, but its bumpy, picaresque shapelessness struck Bellow as a dead end. Augie was too fond of immaturity, a reaction against Bellow's first two novels, which had been too dourly Wastelander. In *Augie*, Bellow had followed Twain, but he needed a new path. With *Herzog*, he found it: a vital realism based on a cuckolded sad-sack intellectual closely resembling Bellow himself. In another writer's book, Herzog would have been either a figure of fun or a lethally dull image of modern angst, but Bellow made him captivating. Like his wife and her lover, the unforgettable peg-leg Valentine Gersbach, Herzog was a personality.

For Bellow, Flaubert's arid, gorgeous books took the first steps toward the modernist disparaging of life and personality. Bellow respected Flaubert: He frequently taught *Madame Bovary*, especially during his years at the University of Chicago, though he preferred Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt*, an achingly mature, unsentimentally moving book with

a knowing, sturdy heroine. Flaubert, Bellow thought, had set fiction on the wrong track by “displac[ing] his enormous energy from subject matter to style.” For him, “literature was a heroic enterprise...in spite of the degeneration of life.” Flaubert created stylistic beauty as an answer to dull, empty bourgeois existence. As for Henry James, he “carved out for his work a reality that he controlled too absolutely.” He had “the despot’s mercy toward his subject”—a deadly accurate description of James’s way with his characters.

Most modern novelists follow Flaubert, Bellow complained in a 1960 essay, “The Sealed Treasure,” because they, like Flaubert, are disappointed by the world’s “human material.” “Flaubert believed that the writer by means of imagery and style must supply the human qualities that the exterior world lacked,” Bellow wrote. The “insistent aesthetic purpose” in James, Woolf, and Joyce, he added, is the writer’s too-forcible effort to color a world that would otherwise be empty. In his novels, Bellow did his best to reverse the impact of Flaubert and return to the fictional worlds of Balzac, Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, for whom meticulous artfulness would only get in the way of the flow of life.

Bellow’s works are not novels of ideas, like those of Camus or Mann, in which, he remarks, the book stands or falls along with the idea. (As an idea, Camus’s *The Plague* was “not so hot,” Bellow wrote in a letter to Roth.) But he was an intellectual from top to toe. “For Darwin it was the struggle for existence that mattered; for me, in those years, it was the struggle for conversation,” Bellow wrote about the 1940s, when he arrived in New York City. He talked and listened intensely to Alfred Kazin, a key influence; to Ellison, Harold Rosenberg, Dwight Macdonald, Philip Rahv, and Paul Goodman. But he also had his suspicions about writers associated with *Partisan Review*. They wanted to give an injection of European avant-gardism to middlebrow America and, if possible, to mate high art with anti-Stalinist Marxism. Bellow had been a Trotskyist in his youth, and had even seen Trotsky’s body in the Mexico City morgue in 1940 (he’d been promised a meeting by one of the former bodyguards of the “old man” but arrived a day too late). By the 1950s, though, he had wised up. Bellow was skeptical not just about revolution, but about blanket denunciations of the bourgeoisie and their bad taste. It reminded him of Flaubertian condescension, a stale, futile road.

Bellow relished the gray toughness of his city’s streets, and its people as well. “Sensitiv-

ity in a mature Chicagoan, if genuine, was a treatable form of pathology,” he remarks in *Humboldt’s Gift*. In one essay, lambasting Sartre’s embrace of revolutionary violence, he makes a streetwise crack: “It is not inconceivable that a man might find freedom and identity by killing his oppressor. But as a Chicagoan I am rather skeptical about this.... It may do more for manhood to feed one’s hungry children than to make corpses.” Unlike the boldly flailing Mailers and Sartres, Bellow had actual wisdom to offer about the world.

Some of that wisdom undoubtedly derived from his Jewish upbringing. In one of this book’s pieces, a lecture titled “A Jewish Writer in America,” Bellow speaks about his Jewish origins. He was sent at the age of 4 to a heder, where he began to learn Hebrew and “to memorize most of Genesis.” As Bellow comments: “It would be a treason to my first consciousness to un-Jew myself. One may be tempted to go behind the given and invent something better, to attempt to reenter life at a more advantageous point. In America this is common, we have all seen it done, and done

in many instances with great ingenuity. But the thought of such an attempt never entered my mind.” Bellow was no new-made Gatsby: He was Jewish to the core, and spoke a fine Yiddish to his last days.

Bellow’s memoir *To Jerusalem and Back* shows his strong attachment to the Jewish state, but also some mixed feelings. *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About* reprints a searching piece that Bellow wrote for *Newsday* after his trip to Israel in 1967 to report on the Six-Day War, in which he faults Israel as well as the Arab countries for failing to address the needs of Palestinian refugees. In Nablus, now in Israeli rather than Jordanian hands, Bellow’s clear eye discerns something telling: an Arab poster for a Robert Mitchum movie. “Mitchum Arabized is strong, honorable, but his features are twisted with foreknowledge of defeat. Fate is dead against him.” The belief in implacable fate—like the Wastelanders’ pessimism, another bad idea—was not for Bellow. Instead, he trusted to life. The people he had known, himself among them, were living arguments for it. ■



Miriam Toews.

The Unfathomable Sadness

by LAUREN OYLER

From the very beginning of Miriam Toews’s *All My Puny Sorrows*, it’s clear that the narrator’s older sister, Elfrieda, will kill herself. The tone is by turns frantic and elegiac, full of both hope and dread; the tense is by turns anxiously present and reminiscent of both the recent and distant past. Although the possibility that she won’t go through with it animates the novel’s plot and protagonists, that hopefulness ultimately exists apart from Elfrieda,

Lauren Oyler is a writer and editor based in Brooklyn.

All My Puny Sorrows

By Miriam Toews.

McSweeney’s. 321 pp. \$24.

who is, for all that we learn about her extraordinary gifts, ultimately a cipher.

Leveled at a writer less gifted than Toews, this might be a criticism. *All My Puny Sorrows* is her sixth novel and a singular achievement, so unexpectedly free of the usual wilting sentimentality and sweeping platitudes that we use to speak about death, family, and the much dramatized yet little understood phenomenon of mental illness.

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Narrated by Yolandi Von Riesen, who goes by the nickname Yoli, *All My Puny Sorrows* has been characterized as “darkly funny”—a cliché that does justice neither to the novel nor its protagonist and her humor, which is more than just a voice, perhaps a genre unto itself. “Darkly funny” is a placeholder term, a phrase we use to indicate that the novel is funny while also being “about suicide.” It connotes lofty aspirations, both intellectual and aesthetic; it might mean that the novel is a deep and involved examination of suicide from a perspective that is somewhat academic, which is to say that the book contains many literary references and is written from the point of view of an experienced and studied outsider—someone who is not suicidal. But *All My Puny Sorrows* is not actually academic, or darkly funny; it is merely and wonderfully a novel that tells us something close to the truth.

All My Puny Sorrows is a portrait of an idiosyncratic, intellectual family. During the sisters’ childhood, the family consists of Yoli and Elfrieda—who also goes by Elf—along with their loving mother and father; during the crises of Elf’s final suicide attempts and for the majority of the narrative, it includes Yoli’s two teenage children, Elf’s husband Nic, an aunt as hearty and jolly as their mother, and more. The girls are raised in a small Mennonite village in Canada, though it’s not really explained why; the insular, stuffy requirements of the village elders are always brushed off, ignored, or rejected, sometimes to the point of temporary excommunication. To Yoli, her older sister is the embodiment of brilliance and beauty, from childhood occasionally seeming like a revolutionary as well as the “center of the spinning world.” As an adult, Elf is a glamorous classical pianist apparently in possession of an otherworldly talent. She also has a working knowledge of what seems like every book she’s ever read and a plethora of foreign languages; she’s been married for years to Nic, who is besotted by her and unwavering in his devotion, even in the face of Elf’s increasingly harrowing psychological torment; she is very thin and elegant and looks much younger than her age.

By contrast, Yoli presents herself as hapless and harried, twice divorced and financially unstable. Unlike Elf and Nic, who have no children, Yoli has two; they seem to exist in a teenage frenzy of text-messaging and growing-up-too-fast that Yoli feels she can’t quite manage. She earns most of her living writing young-adult books about a character named Rodeo Rhonda and lives in awe of her superior older sister.

Still, this is not and was never going to be the story of how a beautiful, world-renowned

pianist comes back from the brink of despair to play the greatest sonata of her life while her supportive and tireless sister remembers tearfully how she helped her through her darkest hours. In a review of the novel in *The Washington Post*, Ron Charles wrote that “what really confounds [Yoli] is the depressive’s maddening self-absorption,” and this is partially correct: Yoli is confounded—but not by Elf’s “maddening self-absorption.” This is a jab rooted in nothing but a conventional, superficial conception of “the depressive” as a person trapped in her own mind, rather than a person suffering from an illness. Much of Elf’s life as we experience it takes place in a hospital bed, where she refuses the classically gross hospital food and is subjected to the classically frustrating hospital bureaucracy; combined with the lifelong struggle, she sounds more like a person living with a chronic condition and less like a bad caricature of Sylvia Plath.

Charles’s characterization also suggests that Yoli spends a lot of time “madden[ed]” by Elf’s impenetrable psyche, trying to grasp it or empathize with it so that she can change it, which is not what ultimately happens. Yoli presents the situation as an ontological impasse: “She wanted to die and I wanted her to live and we were enemies who loved each other.” Even when Yoli is desperately trying to ensure her sister’s continued existence, there’s the sense that her efforts are futile, that what is going to happen will happen regardless of her attempts to will or reason or fantasize or blindly hope her way into an alternate reality in which she tirelessly and tearfully coaxes one beautiful, world-renowned pianist back from the brink of suicidal despair. What Charles calls an “almost plotless” novel is nevertheless progressing toward something: will she or won’t she—and if she won’t, there’s still always the possibility that she will. Various members of the family sit with Elf in the hospital and update one another in “a state of suspension”; they wait and wait, for about two-thirds of the novel, for something to happen. But there are only two options for what that could be, and as long as Elf has not yet killed herself, the Von Riesens will live in that state of suspension.

Elfrieda isn’t actually the “center of the spinning world,” but for a while, she is the center of the dizzying existence that her sister inhabits. In one scene, Yoli is talking to Nic about whether her sister will be able to perform on an international tour, and they feel guilty about not telling Elf’s agent that she has again tried to commit suicide and very well might have to miss the tour, for which significant preparations have already been made.

There's a tense moment of quiet reflection, after which Yoli asks Nic if "he is also feeling the earth rotate on its axis." He reminds her that they're in a revolving restaurant.

A revolving restaurant that feels like the world is a great metaphor for this book: It's a concentrated space, kind of wacky, kind of disorienting, in which serious talk can nevertheless go on inside, though that is also kind of wacky and disorienting. What steers *All My Puny Sorrows* away from the sentimentality common in books "about suicide" is its pace. Throughout the novel, things happen suddenly, both because things just happen suddenly in life and because Yoli's tendency to get worked up and go off on a tangent means that she narrates in long, sometimes worried musings disrupted by non sequitur references and staccato bursts of action or tone-shifting detail; we often learn of events only after they've already happened suddenly. In one hospital scene, Yoli is telling Elf about her life in Toronto and goes on an extended riff about getting her tattoo removed. The image is of a jester, done by "a biker" in exchange for "twenty bucks and a bag of weed," and it's meant to symbolize how she and her ex-husband "together would slay hypocrisy and the duplicity of the world with jokes and magic." ("Afterwards they put Polysporin on it and a bandage and gave me a mint and told me not to shower or exercise for two days and to continue putting Polysporin and fresh bandages on it twice a day for a week. I didn't bother with any of that.") Yoli segues into discussion of her "hapless love life" and summarizes a recent e-mail breakup. Then, "out of the blue," she relates, "like that volcano in Pompeii, Elf asked me if I'd take her to Switzerland."

Switzerland being a place where physician-assisted suicide is legal, this request briefly but suddenly reroutes the novel from the unresolvable suspension of the keeping-someone-not-dead problem to a moral dilemma and mission: Yoli has to decide whether to concede defeat to the enemy she loves.

In another hospital scene—there are many—Elf is angry because a Mennonite pastor from their parents' old church "managed to talk his way in past the nurses' desk" and proceeds to proselytize her, assuring Elf that if she "would give her life to God she wouldn't have any pain.... Could they pray together for her soul?"

What did you do? I asked Elf. I hope you told him to go fuck himself. You should have screamed rape....

I recited a poem, said Elf.

What? I said. A poem? You should have strangled him with your panties!

Philip Larkin, she said. I don't have any panties. They've taken them away from me.

After Elf recites the Larkin poem for this more receptive audience—it's "Days"; very appropriate—comes the big reveal. Yoli asks what the pastor said.

Nothing, said Elf.

Tell her why nothing, said my mom. She shook like old times. She covered her mouth.

Because by the end of it I had taken off all my clothes, said Elf.

The phrase "all my puny sorrows" definitely exemplifies Yoli's quirky, self-deprecating tone. "Puny" could come from the Miranda July lexicon, but instead it's taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "To a Friend, With an Unfinished Poem," which inspires the adolescent Elfrieda to graffiti an abbreviated tag ("A.M.P.S."—it's under the book's dustcover) in red paint on "natural landmarks" around the Mennonite community of East Village. In an exchange that models many of the childhood interactions between Yoli and Elf (or at least models the way the older Yoli relays them), the curious younger girl asks her wiser older sister which natural landmarks she intends to deface, and Elf replies with a dismissive wave of the hand; the execution isn't as important as the idea itself. "Like the water tower, she said, and fences," before making "a sudden karate-chop slice through the air and then star[ing] into the distance as though she'd just heard the far-off rattle of enemy fire."

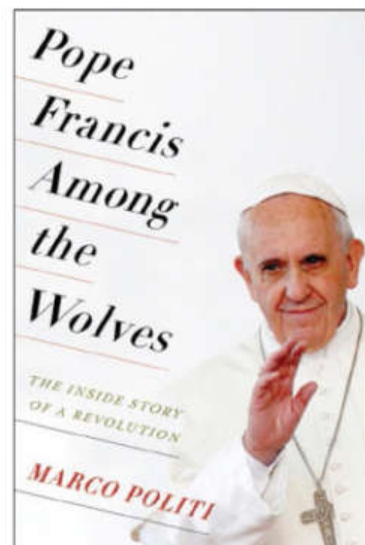
Maybe there's something to be said here about abbreviations—the sisters' nicknames, the novel's title—and the power they have to signify things much larger and more complex than the three or four letters suggest. That the novel very closely mirrors the poem from which it takes its name might, in other books, have set off this reader's sentimentality radar, but it works: because it's sad, because it's both particular and universal. Coleridge is writing an "aiding verse" to a friend whose sister is ill, saying he can empathize: "I too a sister had, an only sister.... To her I pour'd forth all my puny sorrows... / And of the heart those hidden maladies / That e'en from friendship's eye will shrink ashamed." Just as Coleridge begins his poem with an unnecessary apology for his failure as a writer to provide distraction from "anxious thought / Of dissonant mood"—"Thus far my scanty brain hath

Pope Francis Among the Wolves

*The Inside Story of a
Revolution*

MARCO POLITI

Translated by William McCuaig



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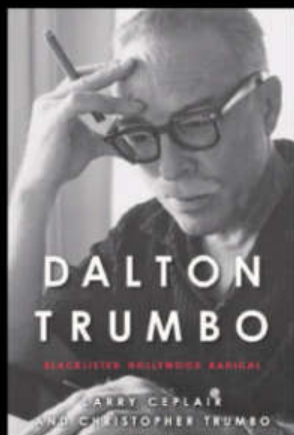


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built the rhyme / Elaborate and swelling; yet the heart / Not owns it"—Yoli's references to her own "scanty brain" are both true and false. Toews's hapless narrator isn't always reliable, at least when it comes to her haplessness. After Elf reveals that she performed her invalid's subversive striptease to scare the pastor away, she explains to Yoli: "I was trying to be like you.... It was all I had."

It's the unyielding impasse of their situation that leads Yoli to decide—after much fraught consideration—to try to fulfill her sister's request rather than fight with her to fight for her life. And because Elf feels like her sister is all she has, Yoli can't mention to their family or to Nic her plans to help Elf kill herself.

Except in her darker, questioning moments, Yoli doesn't really engage with what she calls her sister's "pain"; it's simply Elf's "unfathomable sadness," and Elfrieda is so clearly sketched as both unfathomable and unfathomably sad that there's no question of getting it. You want to shake her, or shout at her, or sit next to her hospital bed and pleadingly tell her how much you love her huge green eyes and transcendental piano playing and ability to conjure smart references from what seems like the complete time line of literary history—but that's because it's not hard at all to empathize with Yoli and the sadness and anxiety and fear and powerlessness of knowing one of your best people wants to renounce her personhood.

Perhaps Toews is able to resist the temptation to try to empathize with and change Elf because she is past the stage of desperately attempting to understand. In 1998, Toews's father—like the sisters' father in the book—committed suicide by walking in front of a train, and two years later Toews published a memoir about the experience. But rather than write about her own grief, Toews tried to access her father's: *Swing Low: A Life* is told from the perspective of Mel Toews, who was diagnosed with severe manic depression (now bipolar disorder) when he was 17. Although he achieved a level of normalcy that his doctors had warned would probably not be possible—a wife, a career, children, stability—after retiring from his job as a schoolteacher, he plunged into the severe depression that led him to suicide. Most of *Swing Low* is in Mel's voice, as Toews imagines it; in the prologue, she explains that her father was "a man who felt he had failed on every level," and *Swing Low* is her "attempt to prove [him] wrong."

It's tempting to read this novel autobiographically, and Toews has acknowledged that—her own older sister committed suicide as well, in 2010—but it's also irrelevant.

Although *Sorrows* is tribute of sorts, it is not an attempt to prove anyone wrong. The unfathomable "Why?" hovers close over both *Swing Low* and *Sorrows*, but in the latter it's not fueling a desperate search for a thesis or proof. Why would someone with such a nice life want to give it up? Neither book can answer this question—we have long known that we will never really understand other people.

The first time Elf is released from the hospital, she finagles a discharge by affecting (or maybe not!) a new beginning, one day saying that she "woke up feeling like a different person." The nurses take this as a good sign, and the hospital "really need[s] the bed." That night, the family celebrates with Indian food and wine, with Elf presiding over the dinner "smiling, a little shy, beautiful and serene, as though she alone holds the answer to the riddle of the Sphinx."

Listen! I want to shout at her. If anyone's gonna kill themselves it should be me. I'm a terrible mother for leaving my kids' father and other father. I'm a terrible wife for sleeping with another man. Men. I'm floundering in a dying non-career. Look at this beautiful home that you have and this loving man loving you in it! Every major city in the world happily throws thousands of dollars at you to play the piano and every man who ever meets you falls hard in love with you and becomes obsessed with you for life. Maybe it's because you've perfected life that you are now ready to leave it behind. What else is there left to do? But I'm finding it hard to make eye contact with Elfrieda.

When the hospital releases Elf a second time, it's a surprise for her birthday, and against Yoli's instructions: Yoli has begged the staff not to let her leave, often waking in the middle of the night to call the hospital aides and make sure that her sister is still there. Ironically, she's been "so obsessed" with keeping Elf in the hospital until she can figure out a way to pay for their trip to Switzerland (they can't use Elf's joint bank account; Nic would notice) that she forgot about the birthday. Yoli hears the news of the temporary discharge from her mother, then sits down in a novelty chair shaped like a hand (which her daughter "had found in somebody's garbage") and says, "[W]ell, then she's gone." Yoli takes her daughter to play tennis, knowing there's nothing she can do, and by the end of the next paragraph, her phone is ringing with "bad news." ■

SHELF LIFE

by MUHAMMAD IDREES AHMAD

OVER A DECADE AGO, WHILE WORKING for an ad agency in Islamabad, I met a recently divorced young woman. She'd grown up in the United States but, when it was time to marry, had submitted to her parents' wishes and returned to Pakistan. Soon after the wedding, she discovered that something was amiss: The marriage could not be consummated because her husband was gay. It would be four years before she was allowed to drop the pretense of wedded life and ask for a divorce.

In traditional societies, marriage is a fraught prospect. It is more than simply the union of two individuals: For the political elite, it's an influence multiplier; for the economic elite, it's a corporate merger; and for the have-nots, it's a bid to have. The personal, as it were, is the political—and the social and the economic. The transactional character of these unions is rarely acknowledged. Material concerns are sublimated to the concept of “honor,” which masks marital dysfunction and serves as caveat emptor. Divorces are consequently rare, and divorcées disdained.

Central to Rafia Zakaria's *The Upstairs Wife: An Intimate History of Pakistan* (Beacon; \$26.95) is the story of her Aunt Amina, who, after her husband takes a new wife, decides to remain in a polygamous marriage rather than suffer the divorcée's fate. Distraught and humiliated, Amina initially returns to her parents and contemplates divorce. But in the face of their anguish and community pressure, she eventually goes back to the indignity of her husband's divided affections.

Zakaria alternates scenes from Amina's life with vignettes from Pakistani history. The episodes, recounted in a vivid, nonlinear narrative, vaguely track Amina's new travails. The disparate strands of seemingly arbitrary events are given shape by Zakaria's larger family history (though not always successfully). This technique is reminiscent of John

Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* or Alfonso Cuarón's *Y Tu Mamá También*. There's a cinematic quality to the oscillation between wide-angle views of society and intimate portraits of the protagonists. Zakaria has a sharp eye for detail, and the family dynamics and social micropolitics are finely rendered. Here is Zakaria on the women who faulted Amina for her inability to have children and showed greater sympathy for her husband—a self-denying hero, in their eyes, who was keeping her despite her flaw: “Many had exacting broods of children, whose pressing needs grated on their lives: denouncing the barren woman elevated them, made their sacrifices of lost sleep and interrupted meals and mountains of soiled clothes a gift to be cherished.”



Rafia Zakaria.

The Upstairs Wife, however, is far from a mawkish catalog of victimhood. In her detailed and sympathetic account of Amina's struggles to regain her husband's affections, Zakaria is setting up the reader for a devastating denouement. But as we accompany Amina, we are also journeying through Pakistan: its culture and society, if not its history.

Amina's is the story of many women (as well as some men) in traditional societies, where the communal superego has a strong claim on individual behavior. They submit because to rebel is to bear a scarlet letter for the rest of one's life. Long before Freud, William Blake spoke of the “mind-forged manacles” that control behavior without overt coercion. The disciplining that begins with

family is augmented through education and enforced by society, so that all are implicated in perpetuating the onerous traditions.

Modern technology and the relative ease of movement have mitigated the worst aspects of tradition, but not entirely. This was illustrated some years back by a gruesome incident in Pakistan. On July 13, 2008, three teenage girls from the Baloch Umrani tribe were shot on the orders of a tribal council for deciding to marry men of their own choosing, then buried while they were still alive. Two female relatives who tried to save them were killed as well. Yet two senators from Balochistan invoked tradition and defended the action. The perpetrators were known but never charged; meanwhile, one of the senators was promoted to a cabinet position. “Honor” proved an irreproachable alibi.

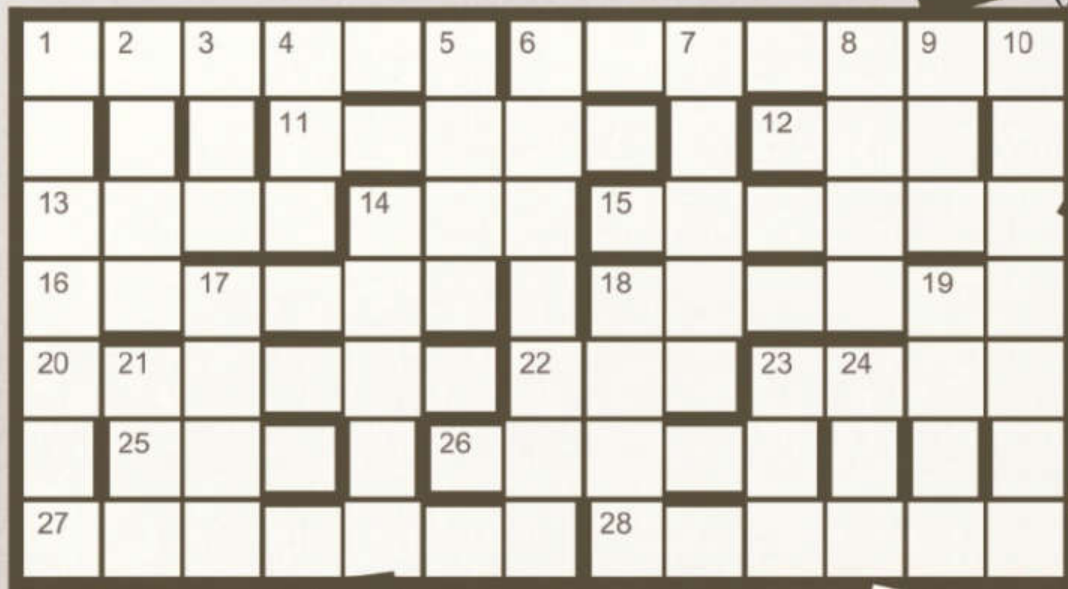
Those who wait for unsavory traditions to die of entropy will be waiting far too long; such resolutions require a legislative catalyst. But laws given by fiat can be taken away by fiat as well; how they're passed is significant. In Pakistan, the minimal protections for women (such as restrictions on polygamy and summary divorces) introduced by Gen. Ayub Khan in 1961 were undone less than two decades later by Gen. Zia ul-Haq and his Hudood Ordinance, which introduced severe punishments for adultery and fornication but made it virtually impossible for rape to be proved in court. By contrast, the laws guaranteeing women's rights, which were introduced more recently under the democratic governments of Benazir Bhutto and Asif Ali Zardari, have endured.

In Pakistan, it's easy to be disenchanted with democracy. But if the country has learned anything in its 68 years of existence, it is the resilience of Churchill's old aphorism: Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those others that have been tried. Apart from the military, Pakistan's institutions remain weak. The strength of civil society compensates for their lack, even serving as an informal social-welfare system. But strong communities are necessarily rooted in tradition—and tradition often stifles the individual. One hope for such people is to distance themselves from the society that smothers them; another is to change society itself. Zakaria's story embodies both possibilities: She too had to submit to an arranged marriage, but after moving to the United States, she opted out; and through her writings and activism, she is lighting the way to a better society. ■

Puzzle No. 3373

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

In 1972, at the height of the Cold War, two chess masters faced each other in the showdown that inspired this puzzle, which is brought to you by the film *Pawn Sacrifice*, opening in select cities on September 16 and nationwide on September 25. This puzzle was created by the same team that designs *The Nation's* puzzle each week—but this time with a special twist: Each Across answer must sacrifice a pawn (the letter P) to become a different word, which should be entered in the diagram; the grandmasters involved appear in the grid at 1 Down and 10 Down, while the appropriate venue for their personal, very cold war is at 6 Down.



ACROSS

- 1 Dandies holding back largely beige instrument found in an operating room (7)
- 6 Psst... nice, crazy eyes (8)
- 11 American writer captivates Chapel Hill institution in spring (6)
- 12 Initially, chimp (or perhaps young ape) (4)
- 13 Irish patron briefly recalled bedtime melody about the west side of Tipperary (2,3)
- 14 Expect a short trip before the end of June (4)
- 15 Retract separate, incomplete term for "snare" (7)
- 16 String of beads for a small English fellow? (7)
- 18 Time in! Presto change-o for ceramicists (7)
- 20 Calling contact about sweetheart (7)
- 22 Peel speaker's fruit (4)
- 23 Front-to-back space walks... (5)
- 25 ...with Dadaist twist (4)
- 26 Visual artist, in the absence of a dramatist... (6)
- 27 ...watched over Yelp, read incorrectly (8)
- 28 Photo one is absorbed by: clever, in a salacious manner (7)

DOWN

- 1 *See introduction*
- 2 Hate to be naked, goddammit (4)
- 3 Sun god protects no messenger, say (3)
- 4 Ignoring the odds, act out in bed (3)
- 5 Mucus in large quantities on the rise (4)
- 6 *See introduction*
- 7 Onset of storm delayed candidates (5)
- 8 Bird's home with a layer of paint, they say (4)
- 9 War god embraced by majority rule (3)
- 10 *See introduction*
- 14 Man putting chicken on deli bread with shortening (5)
- 17 Psychologists, half-compulsive (4)
- 18 Table scraps for Eliot, without fail (4)
- 19 Most of kingdom is concrete (4)
- 21 In support of love, you and I come up short (3)
- 23 Car wrecked in a curve (3)
- 24 Greek character's vital energy (3)

The solution to last week's puzzle is on page 38.

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